supporting Indigenous researchers: a practical guide for supervisors

Alison Laycock with Diane Walker, Nea Harrison and Jenny Brands

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Definition: Within this guide, the term ‘Indigenous’ is used to refer both to Aboriginal people and to Torres Strait Islanders. However, individuals quoted herein use a variety of terminologies when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

foreword

Indigenous health is a pressing social justice issue for Australia. The Australian Government and leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations have committed to a concerted agenda to achieve Indigenous health equality over a generation, and close the equity gap in service provision by 2018. Fundamental to the process of addressing health and social disadvantage is the production and exchange of knowledge—the work of research.

The challenge of finding ways to improve Indigenous health requires knowledge of the highest quality generated through processes that take into account the realities of Indigenous lives and Indigenous communities, of government policy making and bureaucracy, and that are built out of collaboration, respect and trust. It is a large and complex task—and the pool of researchers available to carry out this work is small. We need more skilled researchers with the expertise to work in these complex areas, and we particularly need more skilled Indigenous researchers.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH) is a collaborative research organisation committed to the use of research to improve Indigenous health. It brings together Aboriginal organisations, universities, research institutions and government agencies into a partnership that extends across most Australian states and territories.

The CRCAH has an underlying philosophy that the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at every stage of a research agenda is absolutely vital if the research is to succeed, and if that research is to have positive effects in practice and policy development. It has built structures and processes to ensure that its own research follows these principles, and it is now beginning to see that work come to fruition.

One of the primary aims of the CRCAH is to build the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research workforce. We need more skilled researchers, and we need researchers of the highest quality. Our main focus has been developing the knowledge and skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers—a critical resource in the developing knowledge economy of Indigenous health. However, we also have a responsibility to help develop the capacity of those non-Indigenous researchers whose contributions are vital to carrying out this huge task.

This creates a need for practical resources, such as this one, to support all researchers working in Indigenous health. *Supporting Indigenous Researchers: A Practical Guide for Supervisors* raises critical research issues and speaks to researchers in a way that is real and relevant. It brings together the advice and experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and relates their learnings to accepted practices in workforce development and management.

A companion volume *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers*, which will focus on the specific skills and knowledge for carrying out research in the field of Indigenous health, is due out later in 2009. We are confident that experienced researchers with project and personnel management responsibilities, as well as new and emerging researchers, will find both volumes practical and timely.

The extensive network of partner organisations that makes up the CRCAH is one of its great strengths. In producing this guide we knew we would be pulling together and building on the wonderful work being done by organisations and individuals who have been growing the Indigenous health research workforce over many years. This guide, and its companion volume, reflects that. In it, we have endeavoured to capture the richness and diversity of these efforts around Australia in the many case studies and quotes that bring this work alive. We thank all those who have so generously shared their stories, ideas and experience to help produce it (see Acknowledgments for details).

We hope this guide and its companion volume will not only provide a useful resource for those of us taking up the challenge of improving Indigenous health in Australia, but also for those who—from whatever field—wish to carry out and promote ethical, effective and productive research that really makes a difference.

Mick Gooda
Chief Executive Officer, CRCAH

Ian Anderson
Research Director, CRCAH

table of contents

about this guide

Supporting Indigenous Researchers: A Practical Guide for Supervisors was written by Alison Laycock, with support from Diane Walker, Nea Harrison and Jenny Brands at the CRC for Aboriginal Health. The guide and its companion volume, *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers* (due out later in 2009), have been developed by the CRCAH in response to a growing need for resources in this area.

Indigenous health research needs to be driven by priorities set by Indigenous people, to be of practical use to the Indigenous health sector and to develop research capacity within the Indigenous community. The CRCAH receives frequent requests from individual researchers and organisations for resources and advice about how to conduct research projects in this way, and has identified different audiences with different resource needs.

1. **Supervisors of emerging Indigenous researchers.** Many research leaders have a lot of experience in designing and conducting research but limited experience as supervisors and trainers of emerging researchers. Non-Indigenous supervisors, in particular, want to know how to provide the right type of support to Indigenous researchers and how to build strong intercultural research partnerships.

2. **Emerging Indigenous researchers and other researchers with limited experience in Indigenous health research.** New researchers want to know how to involve participants and the users of research when developing and conducting research projects—how to build Indigenous research ethics, values and approaches into research processes to make the research stronger, and how to make sure the research can lead to real benefits for people's health and wellbeing.

Supporting Indigenous Researchers: A Practical Guide for Supervisors is about good practice in developing the capacity of Indigenous health researchers. The second volume, *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers*, includes the history and context of Indigenous health research in Australia and the planning and management of Indigenous health research projects. Both books offer practical information, advice, strategies and success stories in Indigenous health research.

***Supporting Indigenous Researchers: A Practical Guide for Supervisors* has two parts:**

part a: supervision issues and approaches

Chapters 1 to 3 raise and discuss workplace issues for Indigenous health researchers and their supervisors. The chapters focus on what makes the supervision of Indigenous researchers different to the supervision of non-Indigenous researchers, and suggest ways to build a reciprocal and supportive supervisor–researcher relationship and a strong intercultural research team.

Much of the information is presented through the reflections, experiences and advice of Indigenous researchers and research supervisors.

part b: workplace strategies and resources

Chapters 4 to 7 provide workplace supervisors with practical strategies to tackle the issues raised in Part A and to support Indigenous researchers. The chapters use real examples and stories to guide supervisors in:

- job planning and recruitment of emerging Indigenous researchers
- induction and orientation
- work planning and performance appraisal
- assessing training needs
- designing and supporting on-the-job training and professional development.

The CRCAH welcomes your feedback on these guides. Please visit our website at **www.crcah.org.au** to contact us.

acknowledgments

From the beginning, the writing of this guide has been true to the CRCAH's collaborative way of working. In the early stages of the project, our core partner organisations hosted meetings in Darwin, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide to get input and guidance from key people involved in Indigenous health research.

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- Condy Canuto, Lorian Hayes, Kym Kilroy, Susan Vlack, Megan Williams, *The University of Queensland*
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During the process of writing this guide many researchers were interviewed for case stories, wrote about their experiences, gave permission for their words to be used or shared expertise in other ways. When the first draft was completed, many people from institutions around Australia took time to read chapters and to provide feedback.

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While most interviewees were happy to be identified, some names are not given in the quotes in order to protect identity.

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We sincerely thank all organisations and individuals who have supported the development of this resource.

glossary

ABCD	Audit and Best Practice in Chronic Diseases
AFL	Australian Football League
AIMhi	Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative
CRCAH	Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health
CRCATH	Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health
MAE	Master of Applied Epidemiology
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NIPAAC	National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation
PHCRED	Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
VAHS	Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
YACI	Yolngu Aboriginal Consultants Initiative

part a:
supervision issues and approaches

Many of the strategies involved in the successful supervision and support of emerging Indigenous researchers are good practice for supporting all emerging researchers. However, there are issues and needs that are specific to the Indigenous health research environment.

Good supervision of emerging Indigenous researchers includes:

- regular professional supervision of the research
- awareness of the issues that are specific to being an Indigenous researcher researching Indigenous health
- respect for Indigenous values, Indigenous knowledge and worldviews
- working relationships based on reciprocity and two-way learning
- use of practical, culturally safe strategies to support Indigenous researchers
- one-on-one guidance and development based on individual background, strengths and skills.

Good supervision practices need to be supported by workplace values, systems, policies and resources.

Part A of the guide sets the scene for research supervision. It discusses some of the issues that impact upon Indigenous health researchers, and suggests practical approaches for supervisors in both workplace and academic research settings.

chapter 1:
setting the scene for supervision

Why do experienced researchers need guidance?

If you have opened this guide, it is likely you are an experienced researcher or health professional. You will be well aware of the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, the burden of disease that Indigenous people carry and the difference in life expectancy. You may have been involved in successful health programs and research projects.

You may also be aware of the complex history of Indigenous people's involvement in research, and reforms in policy and practice over the past couple of decades. The reforms aim to ensure that health research upholds Indigenous research values and has direct benefit to research participants and communities. Understanding this history and context is important to good supervision (see *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers*).

Despite progress and changes in research practice, there is still an urgent need to improve the usefulness and benefit of health research to Indigenous people. To meet this need many things are required, such as:

- culturally accepted ways of doing research
- more Indigenous people involved at all levels of the research
- more Indigenous ownership and control of the research
- an increase in the number of Indigenous researchers and research supervisors
- more understanding by non-Indigenous researchers of Indigenous research processes.

The number of Indigenous people involved in health research is steadily increasing, but the demand for Indigenous researchers is also growing. The immediate need for more Indigenous researchers means that Indigenous people often come into research with many years of life and work experience, rather than with the traditional research career path of school and university.

For many Indigenous researchers, training needs to be done on-the-job. The work of the CRCAH and the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health (CRCATH) over the past thirteen years has shown that training of Indigenous researchers often needs to be done 'within the context of research project activity' (Dunbar *et al*. 2004:29). This places high expectations on research supervisors, as well as on new researchers.

If you are a non-Indigenous research supervisor or team leader, you might feel uncertain about how (or whether) the perspectives and support needs of Indigenous researchers differ from those of non-Indigenous researchers. You may be an experienced research supervisor, but have little training in Indigenous matters, support and training techniques, or workplace supervision. Project leaders consistently say they feel ill-equipped to provide research training. They commonly express concern about the lack of guidance available to experienced researchers in their roles as mentors and supervisors for Indigenous research trainees (Dunbar *et al*. 2004). This, in essence, is why this guide has been developed.

Culturally acceptable ways of doing research

Doing health research in ways that are culturally acceptable involves putting Indigenous values at the centre of the research process and honouring traditional and Indigenous knowledge, views and values. It involves more Indigenous people and communities controlling what, why, how and when research is done, as well as how it is used. To achieve these things, Indigenous participation and decision making is required through all parts of a research project.

Indigenous participation and decision making is required through all parts of a research project

An example of research development that is centred on Indigenous decision making is the CRCAH's Facilitated Development Approach. The approach brings together Aboriginal community and health organisations, government health agencies, and research institutions to set research priorities and refine research proposals as part of the process of research project development. See: **<www.crcah.org.au/downloads/FDA-july-2007.pdf>**

It is recognised that some research approaches are better suited to Indigenous health research than others. Collaborative, participatory and multidisciplinary research approaches are often used in community settings because they provide more opportunity for communities to set priorities and guide research processes, to build Indigenous ways of doing things into the project and to 'privilege' the voice of Indigenous participants. For examples, see:

The Yalu' Story website: **<http://yalu.cdu.edu.au>**.

Mibbinbah: Indigenous Men, Health & Indigenous Men's Spaces website: **<www.mibbinbah.org>**.

Kanyini Vascular Collaboration website: **<http://www.kvc.org.au>**.

The second volume, *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers,* is about Indigenous research approaches and processes. It includes many examples of the use of Indigenous research processes within health research projects.

Indigenous research capacity-building is a priority

Funding bodies and governments are committed to building the health research capacity of Indigenous people and communities.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) *Road Map* and the CRCAH *Research Capacity Development Strategy* both highlight the need to strengthen the capacity of Indigenous people to do health research. They support the message that Indigenous health research needs more Indigenous researchers and different pathways for developing research skills.

Theme 6 of the *NHMRC Road Map: A Strategic Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health through Research* is 'Development of the nation's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research capacity (including training Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers) and health research practice in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' (ATSIRAWG NHMRC 2002:14). It includes a 'focus on the range of options for building the pool and skill base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers' (ATSIRAWG NHMRC 2002:14).

An objective of the CRCAH (2006:7) *Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Strategy* is to 'strengthen capacity of, and develop career pathways for, Aboriginal people in health research and related areas and increase the Aboriginal health research workforce'.

Indigenous health research needs more Indigenous researchers and different pathways for developing research skills

Guidance and resources are needed so that experienced researchers can supervise, mentor and train Indigenous researchers

Mick Gooda

Mick Gooda, Chief Executive Officer, CRCAH, talks about the pathways and the challenges for all involved in developing health researchers.

Building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research workforce means that we have to work with those who pursue the academic pathways of postgraduate studies at the Honours, Masters and PhD levels and those who undertake work at the 'lay' level as research officers and assistants, community liaison officers and data collectors to name a few of the roles. We believe there is value and merit in both these pathways—indeed, by building the lay workforce we can provide an appropriate entry point for those people who may wish to move into the academic arena.

In developing [Indigenous research] capacity there can be no compromise in the benchmarks of achievements, be it the applicable standards in academia or in work performance, as only by holding to the highest standards can we ever have any hope of closing the gap.

However, we also believe that there are ways of ensuring people reach these standards that take into account particular circumstances, background and responsibilities from which people emerge.

For more information about the *Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Strategy*, see the CRCAH website **<www.crcah.org.au>.**

Other centres around Australia are also working towards increasing and strengthening Indigenous health research capacity.

} *See Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers* for key policies and funding organisations.

In summary, building the capacity of Indigenous people, communities and organisations to do health research and use the research for practical, positive change means being serious about building quality training and offering real support for Indigenous researchers. This challenges all experienced researchers and research managers to give this a high priority and to truly understand what it means for their practice. It challenges organisations that conduct and fund research to see learning and professional development as a basic part of Indigenous health research projects.

Definition of terms

Indigenous Australians

'The Indigenous population is comprised of people who are of Aboriginal origin, Torres Strait Islander origin or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin' (ABS 2004:1).

Emerging researcher

In this guide the term *emerging researcher* refers to people who are learning to do research rather than those who are well established as researchers.

Emerging researchers bring different backgrounds and experiences to their work and include:

- research students (e.g. from certificate to PhD level)
- research workers without a lot of research experience behind them (e.g. research assistants, recent undergraduates)
- Indigenous community members employed for a research project (e.g. often without a formal qualification).

A person employed to do a short-term one-off task in a research project (e.g. administering a questionnaire), or a community member advising researchers, would not usually be seen as an emerging researcher.

Research supervisor

In this guide the term *research supervisor* refers to the person who is directly responsible for professional supervision and guidance of the emerging researcher and/or the research project, including:

- a workplace team leader
- a lecturer or academic supervisor within a university.

Different workplaces and research projects may use different terms, such as *research leader, principal researcher, chief investigator* or *research project manager*.

Cultural safety

The term *cultural safety* is used throughout this guide. The term was first used in the 1980s by Irihapeti Ramsden, a Māori nurse in New Zealand. Cultural safety in research is research that is:

> *safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, of learning together with dignity, and truly listening* (Williams 1999:213).

Cultural safety is contrasted with institutional or systemic racism, where Indigenous people in Australia have experienced discrimination and disadvantage through prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping: 'much [institutional racism] is unofficial, unnoticed and unintended. Social institutions like schools, the judicial system and health care have their own cultures, specific ways of operating based on narrow understandings of what is normal or proper' (Hollinsworth 1998:54).

Cultural safety in the workplace is about systemic change, not just individual actions. Institutional practices, values, resources and governance arrangements need to respect cultural, social and human values.

Different health research workplaces

Some research workplaces are better set up than others to support emerging Indigenous researchers and this influences supervision practice.

Universities and research institutions

Universities are set up to support research learning and to conduct research. Emerging researchers have the benefit of good libraries, academic supervision, experienced researchers (to give advice and support), and other new researchers with similar needs. As research workplaces, universities:

- teach students to be researchers
- employ researchers
- administer research funding grants (e.g. from the NHMRC or the Australian Research Council).

Community-based organisations and services

Many emerging researchers are employed in community settings where research is not the main business of the organisation. As a result, an emerging researcher might need research mentors outside the workplace as well as help to link with other organisations and institutions to get access to research resources (e.g. databases, libraries, archival collections) or professional development opportunities.

Government departments

Government departments often have research and analysis sections. Research is done at different levels and for different reasons (e.g. the collection of data to evaluate a small local program or the use of research to set policy and plan services).

Other workplaces

There are many other employers and employment settings involved in health research, including private companies, non-government organisations and a variety of partnerships arrangements.

You will need to ensure that your supervision and support program takes into account the needs of the individual researcher, what the workplace and colleagues are able to offer, and what resources and opportunities are needed from outside the workplace or work team.

Needs of all emerging researchers

As a supervisor, you will be well aware of the basic needs of all emerging researchers, who need:

- to be guided by more experienced researchers
- opportunities to think and talk about:
  - » what they are doing, and how and why they are doing it
  - » what is going well and not so well
  - » what is being learned
  - » how to use new knowledge
  - » learning gaps and needs, and how to meet them.
- opportunities to find out what other researchers are doing and to link up with people who can help them develop professionally
- time to learn about the job and feel confident
- to feel culturally safe
- support for wellbeing at work, as well as support to do the research
- to feel part of a work team and to know what's going on in the research workplace (others need to know and value the work they do—this is especially important for researchers who spend a lot of time alone thinking and writing)
- to have adequate funding to be able to undertake and complete the research.

The following chapters explore what some of these general needs mean for Indigenous researchers and how they might shape your supervision and research practice.

chapter 2:
workplace supervision

Good workplace supervision involves regular professional supervision of the research, clear direction and one-on-one guidance in research practice and other workplace processes. Good workplace supervision also requires a good working relationship.

Both relationships and research outcomes are better when Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers understand and respect what each person brings to the research in the way of knowledge, perspectives, skills, experiences and ways of working. Reciprocity is required. Good supervision and support also require non-Indigenous supervisors to acknowledge practical issues that are specific to being an Indigenous researcher and to working with Indigenous research participants. Some of these issues relate to Indigenous identity and cultural matters, and some are based in the education and employment pathways of many Indigenous researchers.

As an Indigenous researcher I have input into research processes within the Indigenous community, I can protect informants, and educate non-Indigenous researchers about appropriate research techniques

Establishing the foundations of a good working relationship

One of the most fundamental things about establishing the supervisor–researcher relationship is getting to know and respect the skills and knowledge that each person brings to the research, and agreeing on how to use these skills in working together. With an Indigenous researcher, this is especially important. The way the supervisor approaches these workplace processes will help to determine the success of the research partnership. It can also be fundamental to the success of the research project.[1]

There are different experiences, worldviews, backgrounds, understandings, approaches and personal goals to learn about, and to learn from.

[1] *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers* includes the principles and processes for planning and managing health research projects based on Indigenous interests and priorities and in collaboration with the Indigenous users of research.

Coming into my position [as an Indigenous research trainee], without a health sciences background, I had barriers to overcome such as understanding medical terminology, methodologies and approaches. Being an Indigenous researcher allows me to have substantial input into research processes within the Indigenous community, to protect informants, and to educate non-Indigenous researchers about culturally safe and appropriate research techniques, while at the same time developing my own research skills. In this way my research philosophy differs from the current dominant western approach. Incorporating my own indigenous worldview into western research methodologies and research procedures is a major challenge.

At times, when research needs to be informed by both these worldviews to tell a story, I feel a lot is left out because of differences in understanding. Due to these differences, attitudes toward the style of research, its themes or its culture at times have an effect on cross cultural relationships (Curtis 2005).

Reciprocity

The challenge of bringing together different approaches and worldviews can be difficult in practice, as Diane Walker, Capacity Development Officer, CRCAH, explains:

Indigenous researchers are employed to bring Indigenous knowledge to the research, but it often then gets lost in the workplace. That is, non-Indigenous staff or supervisors disregard this knowledge and don't listen to what Indigenous people have to say about the best ways of going about developing or implementing a project, particularly on communities. This is where a lot of the tension comes from—Aboriginal researchers don't feel they are listened to. So it is about supervisors providing that support to Aboriginal staff to enable them to incorporate their skills and knowledge into the research. This is one of the main complaints that I hear from Aboriginal researchers.

The most successful working relationships are reciprocal, with different research activities drawing on the specialised and complementary expertise of each person.

Indigenous researchers often have specialised skills, knowledge, perspectives and ways of working, which a supervisor needs to take into consideration in approaching workplace supervision.

- Indigenous researchers often work through their existing community relationships and networks to build trust in the team and support for the research. They are the main point of contact and communication for the community. This role also makes them vulnerable to criticism about the research.
- For many Indigenous researchers, an understanding of the local community means they have a good sense of what is likely to work or fail in practice. Research projects often rely on this expertise.
- Emerging Indigenous researchers often find themselves in the role of 'cultural supervision' of non-Indigenous members of the team, including their supervisors (Devlin & James 2007) (see 'Cultural mentoring' in Chapter 7, 'Training and Professional Development', **p. 137**).
- Many Indigenous researchers work under the close scrutiny of their Elders, leaders, participants and the community involved in their research. They are culturally obligated and committed to doing research in the 'right way'.
- Emerging Indigenous researchers who are community Elders bring the benefit of their leadership and authority to the research project.
- Many Indigenous researchers hold important Indigenous knowledge. This knowledge may be more essential to the research project than the knowledge of a non-Indigenous research leader or supervisor (Ober & Bat 2008).
- Many Indigenous researchers have Indigenous language and communication skills. These skills could be the key to upholding Indigenous research values and collecting accurate data.

Currently, many experienced research supervisors are non-Indigenous. Supervisors have a different set of skills and benefits, which has more to do with being an experienced academic and scholar than being Indigenous or non-Indigenous. For example:

- Experienced academics know how the academic system or institution works and they have established researcher networks.
- Experienced research leaders have research track records, which is important for getting grants and recognition.
- Academics are well practised at reading and writing—they do a lot of it in their training and they keep on doing it!

- Experienced researchers have usually written successful grant applications and reports, and have skills in managing and analysing data—both quantitative and qualitative—as well as in writing up research findings.
- Experienced scholars know how to access, review and analyse the research literature.
- Academics are used to conceptual thinking and complex theorising (which doesn't come naturally to most people).
- Many research leaders have scientific knowledge or expertise in specific health content areas (e.g. diabetes, mental health, primary health care or health policy).
- Research leaders have knowledge of ethics procedures in research.
- Experienced academic research supervisors often have long experience in pastoral care of research students, and may be used to acting as advocates for research candidates within a university.
- Many academics have experience as peer reviewers and as examiners of student work.

Reflecting and learning from each other

Many researchers in successful intercultural partnerships highlight the need for a two-way approach to working, reflecting and learning from each other.

There are many types of support that a supervisor can give—for example, professional, academic, technical knowledge, interpersonal. Giving an Indigenous researcher the right support, through supervision, will depend a lot on how well the supervisor and emerging researcher get to know each other, how openly they are able to communicate and what they learn about each other. Support depends on the experience and knowledge each person brings and what they aim to get from the relationship.

Giving an Indigenous researcher the right support, through supervision, will depend a lot on how well the supervisor and emerging researcher get to know each other, how openly they are able to communicate and what they learn about each other

Melodie Bat (left) and Robyn Ober, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory **Photo: Ruby Ballantyne**

It is our assertion that, for Indigenous researchers to become empowered through collaborative research endeavours undertaken with non-Indigenous researchers, it is imperative that the collaboration itself is conducted in a two-way approach. This means that reflecting on and understanding the very process itself must become part of the research collaboration (Ober & Bat 2008:2).

Robyn is becoming more and more aware that she has conceptual understandings and knowledge that non-Indigenous people, such as myself, are yet to learn. She has been thinking about Indigenous knowledge systems and how links can be made to Western academic traditions… (Ober & Bat 2008:4).

Melodie… brings a wealth of experience and knowledge from her own work and studies… I feel we work pretty well together, I know we are both flexible and open to discussion and negotiation, however if there's something I feel really strong about, I will present the rationale for my decision and hope to convince Melodie as I'm sure she will do the same (Ober & Bat 2008:5).

Research projects are not just about involving Indigenous researchers, it's about making a fundamental shift away from 'non-Indigenous Researcher = Principal Researcher' and 'Indigenous Researcher = Co-Researcher'; about finding a new way of expressing our roles and responsibilities within collaborative efforts (Ober & Bat 2008:2).

Judith Dwyer (left) and Kim O'Donnell **Photo: Tiffany Cowling**

Case story—Good practice supervision

This case story is a good example of how a supervisor takes into account the framework within which an emerging Indigenous researcher works. In this partnership there are agreed ground rules and processes, good communication, and mutual respect and trust.

Kim O'Donnell is a Paakantji woman from far western New South Wales and a full-time researcher in the Department of Health Management at Flinders University in Adelaide. Judith Dwyer is a Professor and Head of the Department of Health Management at Flinders University's School of Medicine in Adelaide. She is an experienced health care manager and participant in policy debates.

Kim O'Donnell: 'What I like about working with Judith'

Conversations with Judith are easy; she doesn't dictate. Judith explains issues in a clear, practical and logical way. She listens intently, is encouraging and values my opinion by regularly asking, 'What do you think?'.

We meet once a week and always begin with a cup of tea and a chat about family, gardening and other interests. We laugh a lot… then we get into the business.

About reciprocal, two-way learning

Our way of working is reciprocal; we learn from each other and value the skills each one brings to the project. The first time we co-presented, Judith asked me, 'How do you want to do this? Would you like to introduce the project or shall I?'

I appreciated being given the choice. As a learning experience, I chose to lead the presentation. We planned and agreed about how I would present. Judith supported me by saying, 'If you get stuck, just call on me' and I felt comfortable to do just that! This worked well for us.

Respect for each other's ways and the knowledge we each bring underpins our working relationship. Judith seeks my advice about engaging with Aboriginal people—for example, when there wasn't time in a different project to develop the relationships needed to interview Aboriginal women about an important health issue, I was able to use my networks to find Aboriginal women who were keen to participate.

About recognition of roles outside the research

Judith understands the social and personal issues that affect me as an Indigenous person—attendance at funerals, personal family grief and commitment to my community through Mutawintji National Park business. Judith is flexible and understanding—she understands when I start to feel burnt out. She watches out for me and understands when I need to take time out to recharge. It is especially important for Aboriginal women in leadership roles to be able to do this and still be trusted to get the work done.

Being committed to Indigenous health improvement means being committed to both my role as an academic researcher and my involvement at Mutawintji National Park. Judith and I have found a way where my academic research position can complement my commitment to the management of Country and the health and wellbeing of my people through Mutawintji National Park.

Judith Dwyer: 'What I like about working with Kim'

I think Kim and I have got some important things in common that give us a good basis for working together. For example, we're both really interested in good process among groups or teams for getting results and we're both very independent in our thinking about the world. She is also very open and honest about how her work is going, when she's feeling overwhelmed or confronted or bamboozled, and the things she finds hard to do.

Meeting every week to review tasks and progress and talk about how we're each going has worked out really well for us, and I'd recommend that as a method.

I value Kim's confident approach to working through difficult issues or tasks we jointly face, and we've had some real breakthrough conversations by being upfront about difficulties in the work. She's also great at helping me figure out community relationship issues when I'm not quite getting it, or perhaps misreading the messages. There's a lot more I could say…

About supervising across cultures

[Supervising across cultures] can be a difficult issue but, for this team, is okay. Kim is very open about her other projects and involvements, and when important family or community matters might get in the way of her research work. We've agreed that we play it by the normal rules.

For example, every professional has some professional obligations, like committee work that is relevant to their role, or mentoring others, and it is okay to use work time for these responsibilities. If they prevent the person from fulfilling their main responsibility, then it needs to be addressed, and maybe some roles or projects might have to be put on the back burner for a while. Maybe it's good luck that Kim's additional work (like for NHMRC panels and chairing the Mutawintji Board) is relevant to the project that is her main role.

Also, all of us have family problems and obligations, and we all have to manage them. So far, we've been able to deal with every issue we've confronted through the same principles and rules I apply with all staff [that] I supervise and that I expect to apply to me. The shape and flavour is different, but the principles are the same. Maybe this is a kind of cop-out, but it's working.

I think about Kim's great cultural knowledge and brokering skills as part of her professional skill set. I also try to make sure that not 'everything Aboriginal' that comes up at work is somehow Kim's problem.

In working with Aboriginal people, I have had to learn some different courtesy rules. Mostly, I now understand them, and am fairly comfortable. I find that the Aboriginal people I come into contact with are mostly very tolerant about this. But it takes a level of energy and sometimes conscious focus to relax and just be with people (a paradox, I know), and it tires me out sometimes. I can understand a bit of what Aboriginal people mean when they talk about the pain or difficulty of having to work in a dominant culture that they are not really part of. I can also understand what Kim means when she feels overwhelmed occasionally. This stuff needs to be counted as part of the workload.

Having said that, I also have to speak about the wonderful warmth and generosity and acceptance I feel when I'm with Aboriginal people (after we get to know each other a bit). I think this might be part of the reason I'm working in the field—when it's good, it feels so great.

Avoiding assumptions

It is important not to make assumptions about supervision and support needs based on a person's Indigenous identity. It is also important not to make assumptions about an Indigenous person's understanding of communities and Indigenous knowledge traditions.

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a wide range of lifestyles and social, cultural, educational and family backgrounds. What is true of one Indigenous person or group is not necessarily true of another person's values and life style (Brown 2001 in Freemantle *et al*. 2007:7).

> Each person has his or her own goals, principles, values, strengths, flaws and characteristics. Each Indigenous person has different experiences and multiple personal and professional identities, including his or her Indigenous identity (Paradies 2005:270).

A supervisor should spend time getting to know his or her research colleague. The unique things about each person (including particular cultural and family backgrounds) will help to determine how he or she understands and approaches the research, the type of supervision and support needed, and how the supervisor and researcher work best together.

Intercultural communication issues

In an intercultural team it can take time for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to adjust to different ways of working and communicating and of interpreting actions and words. Communication (and miscommunication) in verbal and non-verbal language, and in the 'rules' about how things are done, can have an impact on the supervisor–researcher relationship.

Communication (and miscommunication) in verbal and non-verbal language, and in the 'rules' about how things are done, can have an impact on the supervisor–researcher relationship

A successful team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who have worked together (running cross-cultural training) for more than fifteen years have written about some of the things they have learned:

Interacting with each other across cultures involves some stress but is also very enriching.

Clarifying and checking that the message behind our words has come across as intended is paramount to effective cross-cultural communication.

Our cultural values can unintentionally make us say or do things… that are perceived as intentional.

Negative and positive stereotyping are major barriers to communicating across cultures.

There is direct connection between power relationships and communication that can cause fear, suspicion and mistrust.

Culture alone is not the only thing that determines how we interpret situations and each other's interaction.

Two parties can disagree about their behaviour in cross cultural situations without either party being 'wrong', as long as there is agreement about shared goals.

We should always be prepared for surprises—things are often not as they seem, because we each experience, observe, interpret and evaluate in a different way.

If we take the time to develop enough trust to learn from each other how not to be 'Binan Goonj'—that is 'hearing but not listening'—we can arrive at a shared understanding of how best to communicate (Eckerman *et al.* 2006:104).

If we take the time to develop enough trust to learn from each other... we can arrive at a shared understanding of how best to communicate

Practical issues in the Indigenous research environment

Some issues in the research environment and workplace can add to the challenge of getting established as a researcher. Supervisors can support emerging researchers by consciously tackling these issues, by raising awareness about the issues in the workplace and by working towards good practice research that is culturally safe.

Having time to do things the right way

When researchers talk about Indigenous research projects, the issue of time is usually raised—having enough time for the right processes. Being well placed, as an Indigenous researcher, to engage people in research does not mean the process is any quicker. Researchers need to take time to get established, to develop relationships, to build knowledge, to work with the authority structure and to earn respect in each (different) community.

> *It takes time to get things out of the Koori community—even with other Kooris. They are not going to tell me anything quicker than anybody else* (Esme Saunders in VKHRCDU 2001:9).

> *Aboriginal people like to work through existing relationships and this means they work through the Indigenous researcher to find out what's happening. This can slow down the research* (Kim O'Donnell, Flinders University, South Australia).

Being the face of the research

Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are deeply suspicious of research. People have been harmed by poor interpretation of past research and by harmful practices and policies that were justified through research. Historically, researchers and research institutions were seen to benefit most from research, with little real health benefit from the research reaching Indigenous communities and families.

In this historical and ethical context there can be high expectations on Indigenous researchers to be agents of change. They can be held personally accountable if the research project doesn't result in benefits to the community.

Researchers can also be criticised when things go wrong, even when those things are outside the control of the researcher. It is even harder when a researcher is the only Indigenous researcher on a project team.

Indigenous workers can be put on projects without other Indigenous staff. This makes it hard, as other people may not have a lot of cultural understanding and may not understand issues relating to Indigenous researchers doing research on Indigenous people. This can be especially hard if you are doing community work in your own community. Indigenous researchers I speak to sometimes find it a bit rough because they become the face of the research project and if something goes wrong, they are the ones that community people are going to say, 'Hey, you didn't do this right.' But the community won't go and talk to the other researchers in the project like that.

Another thing is a lot of the Indigenous people they employ here are local people, so long after the research is gone, they are still here. Communities have long-term memories! It stays around. It mightn't have even been your fault if a project went bad, but you're the face, you're the one (Mark Mayo, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

Indigenous researchers I speak to sometimes find it a bit rough because they become the face of the research project and if something goes wrong, they are the ones that community people are going to say, 'Hey, you didn't do this right'

Ensuring a range of research experiences

There is a risk that spending a lot of time in a community facilitator–mediator role means less experience with other research processes, such as data collection and analysis, writing and publishing.

Indigenous researchers often join research teams after a project has been approved and funded, which means they miss opportunities to work on ethics proposals, research design and grant applications. The best approach is to engage Indigenous researchers from the start—it's important for building research capacity and track

records—but if the project is already underway, the supervisor can plan how to provide these opportunities. A range of experiences can be built into the person's workload as part of the supervision and development program (by getting involved in other projects if necessary) so that the researcher learns a range of research skills on the job.

> *This research project is one of a number I have undertaken in my new position as a researcher for the Institute. I am developing research skills by my involvement in a number of current projects. This has helped me to build up confidence as a researcher, learning about research methods, methodology, processes, ethics, funding bodies, etc. I am being mentored by experienced people who have come up alongside me to encourage and support me* (Ober in Ober & Bat 2008:6).

Overcoming negative education experiences

Indigenous researchers might have had negative education experiences in the past, which influence views of mainstream teaching and learning approaches. For some people, these past experiences can mean that getting feedback from 'teachers' or supervisors about things that need to be worked on (e.g. writing skills) can be confronting. However, it needs to be done.

Discussion about things that need to be worked on can be balanced with positive feedback about strengths and learning achievements.

> *Being upfront and honest is important. If there is a problem, it needs to be dealt with, but the way you deal with it is determined by the person, the issue, the relationship and the context. Often Indigenous people find it difficult to take criticism, no matter how constructive—fear of failure is a real problem. So I like to draw and highlight positives first and then bring in areas of concern to work on and improve* (Robyn Ober, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory).

One-on-one advice always exists in the context of a relationship. The most useful feedback will be clear, specific and detailed, and will help to reinforce a respectful relationship. Descriptive language (such as, 'We might need to re-shape a couple of these sentences, so the meaning is clear for readers who don't know much about this') is more constructive than judgmental language (such as, 'This doesn't make sense').

Supervisors should be aware that confidence might also be an issue for some new researchers, especially if formal education is limited. Supervision sessions need to be centred on the emerging researcher in such a way that the researcher feels comfortable with how the sessions are conducted and always gets something positive out of them.

Adjusting to a different type of work

Many emerging health researchers come into research jobs as mature-age workers, and bring a wealth of work and life experiences. It is common for people to come from administration and frontline service jobs. The adjustment and learning involved can be major, even when the subject of the research is familiar.

When you get here, it's a whole different culture, a whole different language. Your mind has to think in a totally different way, going from that community [role]. You've done all that service delivering, you've seen all the problems. And so you're now over here and you want to look at how you can try and help to fix all those problems. I think it just took me time to get out of that service delivery mind.

I never was much of a reader. I remember when I first started, [my supervisor] gave me all these papers—read these, read these. And some of them, they were really big documents and I used to be the sort of person—reading and I'm asleep. And the writing, I've never written so much in all my work life… The most I wrote was a progress note to a paragraph, or something on a client I saw in my work area. Same with admin, it's short writing. So it's been a big change… to be actually sitting on the other side and having to read and doing writing yourself, it's a new thing and something I'm still building on. I can only get better the more I do it, hopefully.

Many emerging health researchers come into research jobs as mature-age workers, and bring a wealth of work and life experiences

The adjustment and learning involved can be major, even when the subject of the research is familiar

When I came into it, I couldn't believe how many meetings you had to attend, whether they'd be consultations with services, people, communities, reference groups, all those… a lot of meetings, a lot of talking (Carolyn Thompson, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

As an Aboriginal I have faced real barriers which I have had to deal with and overcome such as… adapting to an academic environment, developing professional philosophies and gaining knowledge about health related issues in order to develop the foundations of my research capacities… developing skills in time management and organisational strategies to manage a research workload.

I had feelings of inferiority within the workplace during the first month, only due to this being my first academic work environment; they were rapidly replaced by a feeling of overwhelming support and comfort. My colleagues were well aware of the issues I had to confront… Since starting this position I have been able to progress with the slow expansion of my research vocabulary and am beginning to understand the academic terminology being used by my colleagues (Mentha 2005:885).

Getting proper recognition

Indigenous researchers often do not get full recognition for their role and what it contributes to the research. Part of this comes from the way Western research places high value on academic qualifications compared with other credentials.

According to the current administrative system, Melodie is the 'Principal Researcher' and Robyn is the 'Co-researcher'. However, we have noted that that this does not truly reflect the roles… Robyn holds important Indigenous knowledge that is central to this project. Melodie's role has also been important but is not essential to the research project. We complement each other and support each other well, but without the knowledge held by Robyn there would be no project (Ober & Bat 2008:7).

Part of the lack of recognition comes from the competitive part of the research culture—the connection between publications, recognition, reputation and winning grants.

When you apply for money they're wanting researchers to have a track record and there are some people who win money all the time and have got this so-called track record that have never been out in the field. They just put their name down on these joint applications, they get a project officer to come along and go out and do all the leg work and they get their name on a document and all of them… get ten, fifteen documents to publication and everyone thinks they're the expert on this issue.

Publications we've done here have our organisation's name on it rather than me, so when funding bodies look at me for a track record, I've got no track record but I've got more experience and more knowledge than these people I'm just thinking about, they're the ones whose names keep popping up on all these applications… If you don't have them, you don't win the money; if you don't win the money, you can't do the work (Alwin Chong, Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia).

There are other barriers to getting a track record in Indigenous health. A recent study of the research workforce in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health found that the long timelines in Indigenous health research projects are an issue for early career researchers because they can make them seem less productive as researchers (Rumbold *et al*. 2007:15). That is, researchers work on fewer projects in a given timeframe. This is a particular issue for Indigenous researchers, who tend to work only on Indigenous research projects.

Many community publications are not valued as 'academic track record' by research funders or universities

Academics take authorship extremely seriously. It is the main criteria by which track record is assessed. Being named as an author on a paper also means being held responsible for part (or sometimes all) of what is written. Disputes over authorship can prevent an article being published.

There can also be tension between publishing in academic journals and government reports, and publishing for community access. Many community publications are not valued as 'academic track record' by research funders or universities. This works against the ethical priority of reporting the research to the people and service providers most likely to benefit from the research findings. Many researchers feel this is an important part of health research reform.

Deciding authorship of journal articles, reports and submissions can be complicated when people are doing project work (rather than their own academic study).

> *We've got grants. When Bart [Currie, my supervisor] first put my name on the grant application, I said, 'You sure you want to do that? I don't have any experience.' He said, 'Nah, that's fine, leave it on.' That showed to me he was confident in my abilities. Bart has been good with any journal articles we've published. He makes sure that the people in our group have their names as authors on the publication, not just because they are in the group, but we all have contributed to the work on it so we deserve to be recognised for that work* (Mark Mayo, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

Academic journals and research institutions have their own guidelines for authorship, including criteria for deciding the order of authors' names. Even when the rules are clear, these decisions can need careful consideration. As described below, two researchers made a decision to put the name of the Indigenous researcher first on their joint publication. This was in recognition of how important her Indigenous knowledge was to the research.

> *Whose name goes first on the paper? Conventionally, and following the Institute's current research administrative structure, Melodie, as the 'Principal Researcher' would put her name first on the paper with Robyn, as 'Co-Researcher' coming second. However, both of us have worked hard on the publication… furthermore, this paper is one written about Indigenous knowledge and one that is reliant on the authority of the Indigenous researcher* (Ober & Bat 2008:7).

Being an 'insider' researcher

Being an 'insider' researcher—that is, doing research with Indigenous participants as an Indigenous researcher—can be challenging. It does not mean that research is easier; it is complex and, at times, confronting.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999:10) makes the point that 'indigenous researchers work within a set of "insider" dynamics and it takes considerable sensitivity, skills, maturity, experience and knowledge to work these issues through'.

Bronwyn Fredericks (2007:45) supports Smith's words. She writes about what it means to be an Aboriginal woman researcher researching with Aboriginal women.

As a woman regarded as an 'insider', there are other aspects that needed to be considered by women and community members: my background, my placement, linkages, age, gender, status, political connections, political base, organisational connections, my work (both paid and unpaid) background, whether I could actually do the work, whether I respected and followed the protocol and process, my place within the Rockhampton Aboriginal community, and many more issues. These issues pertaining to me as an Aboriginal woman researcher are not the same as those that pertain to the non-Indigenous researcher.

Esme Saunders says:

Koori researchers must interact across the Community, be respectful of family and kinship obligations and appreciating the politics of the Community from a Koori perspective… Koori communities do not necessarily discriminate between personal and professional identities when judging a person's character and worthiness of respect. Individualistic approaches to researcher roles will run counter to Koori Community values and Koori identity and appropriate ways of behaving (VKHRCDU 2001:10).

Sometimes researchers are both 'insiders' and community 'outsiders'. This can make a researcher's position even more complex.

Every Koori Community is different, and Community members expect that their Community be treated as unique in its own country… Koori outsiders to another Koori community's country are expected to be respectful of that Community's cultural and political practices and knowledge (Esme Saunders in VKHRCDU 2001:8).

Even researchers who have family connections may have to go through a sort of 'rite of passage' process that is specific to the community and situation before they are offered information that is relevant to the research.

As well as community expectations, there can be expectations from non-Indigenous colleagues that an Indigenous researcher will be able to 'open doors' in Indigenous communities. This is a risky and unreasonable assumption—and it puts extra pressure on inexperienced researchers.

Living in the research

Researching Indigenous health can be a difficult, emotional journey: 'The strength of oral history and connectedness through family ties brings the experience and trauma of past generations into the lives of Aboriginal people today' (Howard 2006:16). A person can feel they are both the researcher and the researched.

In specifically undertaking health research, I struggled reading the pages filled with what has happened to those who have been before, health statistics, health policies, and the lack of real government action, being the Chairperson of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service and living within the community and knowing of yet another death, serious illness or an arrest or act of injustice… There were some extremely difficult times for me as an Aboriginal woman… (Fredericks 2008:115).

Serene Fernando

As an Aboriginal woman myself, with ancestors from the same lands as the people from Toomelah and Boggabilla [where I was doing my research], I felt a strong connection and shared empathy with the people. To me the people of Toomelah look like my family, and I can see my mother's face when I look at some of the Aboriginal people living there. This made me feel like I was constantly with familiar people and some I felt I knew for years. To me the people of Toomelah are my people and, excuse me for my obvious bias, but when I heard and read the stories of the past, I was not only reading and finding out about it for the first time, I connected with it and felt the pain and suffering that they went through (Serene Fernando, PhD student, Australian National University, Australian Capital Territory).

Meeting family, kinship and cultural obligations

Family and community are central in Indigenous cultural practices and there are obligations with particular kin relationships. For many people there are obligations to Country that need to be honoured and community leadership roles to fulfil. The time and commitment involved in these obligations can affect working life.

Everyone has family and professional obligations that influence work and that need to be managed. These obligations need to be anticipated when project timelines are decided.

The issue is not whether to support people to meet these obligations, but how to do it so that it doesn't negatively affect work and relationships in the work team. Even in the most flexible and supportive workplaces, balancing and managing workloads can be challenging. A collaboratively agreed approach can prevent these obligations becoming a source of stress or tension (as seen in 'Case story—Good practice supervision' earlier in this chapter, **p. 19**).

Coping with health and other problems

> *The poorer health standards which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' [sic] experience relative to other Australians are expressed in a significantly shorter average life expectancy at birth, higher rates of death, illness, injury and associated disability and compromised quality of life across all age and sex groupings* (ATSIRAWG NHMRC 2002:1).

Health researchers are well aware of these hard facts and the social determinants that relate to them. On a personal level, they are the lived experiences of friends and colleagues, if not also of family members:'[Indigenous] researchers are affected by the same problems that affect their community, which may influence their work' (Holmes *et al*. 2002:1275).

For Indigenous members of the research team, the problems often mean coping with personal and family illness, trauma and worry for family members and close friends, grief and loss, and other hardships. These things can influence work attendance and performance: *'The burden of ill health, when combined with the degree of family "connectedness" and responsibility for an extended family, creates pressures on Aboriginal workers that are not present for most non-Aboriginal staff'* (Howard 2006:21).

It is important for non-Indigenous staff in the workplace to understand this reality. At times of crisis, having supportive colleagues can influence whether people feel able to stay on top of things and continue with work and/or study.

Tips for workplace supervisors

Workplace support can come from the organisation, supervisors and peers. It can be formal and informal. Structured supervision meetings and professional development events are examples of *formal* support, as is equal employment opportunity or cultural security policy in workplace practice.

People give informal support in many ways. Whether emerging researchers feel well supported has a lot to do with how managers, research supervisors and co-researchers understand and respond, on a personal level, to these practical issues in the Indigenous health research environment.

Get to know each other and find the things you have in common. This will help you give the right support at the right time, and will help the team work well together. It will help you to develop a supervisor–researcher relationship that works well for both parties.

The quality of your interpersonal relationship can directly influence your effectiveness as a supervisor in any work setting. In a cross-cultural relationship there may be different management practices to take into account. Standard Western management practices might not necessarily work well in a cross-cultural context: 'Aboriginal management styles involve authority that is in large part derived from relationships, western managers derive authority from defined roles, policies and procedures' (Howard 2006:30).

Day-to-day strategies

General ways in which supervisors can give emerging researchers practical support are to:

- listen, watch
- work as collaboratively as possible—share information and encourage all team members to work this way and help each other out
- ask the researcher what would help and support him or her, and follow through (if you can't follow through, explain why)
- encourage the researcher to ask questions and express views and opinions
- be clear about roles and expectations
- be honest and upfront

- recognise the need for both Western research skill development and Indigenous research skill development, and the time needed to work out how they work together in different situations—learning is an ongoing and two-way process
- analyse and talk through issues and strategies together, recognising that you have different perspectives—don't be afraid to ask questions when you are unclear about something
- acknowledge personal difficulties and dilemmas (for an Indigenous person doing Indigenous health research)
- encourage a wide circle of professional support, including Indigenous research mentors
- pair the researcher with other Indigenous staff in the organisation
- look out for signs of stress and offer help.

About listening and watching… Supervisors need to give emerging Indigenous researchers time to think and process information, to organise thoughts and ideas and then speak it out in words. Sometimes people are thinking and reflecting and not eager to give an immediate response, but need to go away and consolidate their thoughts, especially if it's a response to something major (Robyn Ober, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory).

It's important to be aware of what's going on outside the workplace. We need to know what's happening for each other—it's about mutual respect and pastoral care. There are times when the research project won't be the top priority in someone's life and there will be times when we need to offer extra support (John Wakerman, Director, Centre for Remote Health, Alice Springs).

Don't expect an Indigenous researcher to fit into the mould of what your experience says a typical researcher should be. Indigenous health research needs Indigenous researchers to have different assumptions, perspectives and ways of doing things

A policy framework for support

Practical support can be formalised by making it workplace policy. A policy framework has two functions:

- to acknowledge the importance of professional, family and cultural obligations
- to set out protocols to:
  - » guide communication when a person needs extra support or time out
  - » guide teamwork (e.g. how to share work and attend to urgent work when someone is away)
  - » guide workload management (e.g. deciding which professional obligations are/are not part of the research role).

Collaboratively developing the policy framework can be a good team activity. The process will help to raise awareness and promote understanding of the practical issues for all researchers working in the Indigenous health research environment.

Change your expectations

Don't expect an Indigenous researcher to fit into the mould of what your experience says a typical researcher should be. Indigenous health research needs Indigenous researchers to have different assumptions, perspectives and ways of doing things. It needs Indigenous researchers to have different ways of interacting with people, compared with non-Indigenous researchers. This is what makes an Indigenous researcher an Indigenous researcher, and not an Indigenous person doing research. And this will help to make a difference to Indigenous health outcomes in the longer term.

I was never formally prepared within the classrooms or lectures in which I sat to be an 'Indigenous researcher'. I was prepared to be an 'Indigenous person' who would know how to teach and research using Western frameworks that can further colonise and act out imperial measures on Indigenous knowledges… I came to understand that if as an Indigenous researcher I did not and do not interrogate what I have learnt, look at how I use what I have learnt and how I act, I can assist in perpetuating bias, colonisation and racism (Fredericks 2008:117).

All members of an intercultural research team can learn from observing different ways of working.

Promote networks and new experiences

Focus on widening the researcher's experiences and research network:

- identify learning experiences beyond your own project (e.g. collaborating on an ethics proposal or grant application, attending a workshop in writing grant applications, work placements)
- support collaboration between new Indigenous researchers and more-experienced Indigenous researchers
- help build non-Indigenous and Indigenous research networks and contacts (examples of Indigenous research networks are Wirraway Mirrim in Victoria, the Indigenous Studies Research Network based at Queensland University of Technology, the Indigenous Staff Network within the Australian Rural Health Education Network and the CRCAH; see Useful Websites and Resources for web details, **p. 176**)
- support attendance and presentations at relevant conferences and events (e.g. Indigenous Researchers' Forum, health conferences).

Establish a track record for the emerging researcher

You can help the researcher to get wider recognition for his or her work in a number of ways:

- acknowledge the role of the emerging researcher in all research documents, including behind-the-scenes work that he or she does
- include the researcher as a member of grant application teams
- seek out opportunities for the emerging researcher to publish or co-publish, and give one-on-one support, if needed, to write for publication
- promote or involve the work of Indigenous colleagues in your own presentations, journal articles, other publications and professional networks

- negotiate formal recognition of the researcher's role on project reference groups and committees
- help the researcher to document all research-related work for his or her curriculum vitae—for example:
  - » project presentations, invitations to be on forums/panels, membership of professional bodies, and input to policy documents, reports and events
  - » the right to speak on particular topics on behalf of particular groups, and his or her history of experience in this area
- use opportunities to talk up what the researcher is doing and how important he or she is to the success of the research.

One way of helping Indigenous researchers to get recognised for our research roles would be to formally acknowledge the groundwork we do to get a project up. A proposal or a paper needs something up front like: 'This project would not be possible without the work of these people, and I thank them…' (Kim O'Donnell, Flinders University, South Australia).

One method we have used to 'launch' a researcher not used to writing into the experience of writing is to audio-tape them telling the story of their project, transcribe it, then work with them to organise the transcript into a publishable article. The Aboriginal people I have worked with in this way already had a well thought out narrative that hit the paper in a well-formed, logically developed, coherent document (Merridy Malin, Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia).

Educate the team

Make sure you explain to the team why things are different for Indigenous workers. It shouldn't be left to the Indigenous workers to justify their approaches and their support needs to other staff.

People in the workplace need to understand what support means and how things are different. Sometimes the intercultural understanding applied in research practice can be overlooked in the day-to-day work of the project team.

They bring you in and as soon as you're in the workplace they assume that you're the same as them now… you know, you're here now, you either survive or you don't, they feed you to the sharks sometimes (Indigenous researcher).

Get cross-cultural training

Team members need professionally designed and delivered cross-cultural training programs that are relevant to the area where the research team is working.

> *A major issue for Aboriginal people is the effort it takes to explain or answer all the questions mainstream organisations have about Aboriginal culture. 'It is not up to Aboriginal people to educate the mainstream about all things Aboriginal'… Mainstream organisations need to take responsibility for training their own staff about Koori history, culture and values, and about the local Koori community* (Waples-Crowe & Pyett 2005:14).

Individuals should not need to take on a cultural education role in an intercultural team or research workplace. Nor should it be expected that emerging researchers have the time and skills to do this 'training' (which is not part of their job description or selection criteria).

Local Aboriginal organisations can help to identify suitable training providers.

When there are problems in the supervisor–researcher relationship

The stories and strategies in this guide focus on ways to establish and maintain a positive and productive supervisor–researcher relationship. This chapter has raised many issues that cause concerns for Indigenous researchers, and has offered advice about ways to avoid problems developing.

It is natural, in a close working relationship, to have differences of opinion from time to time. But in some working relationships there can be persistent tensions or an ongoing lack of rapport. When problems are ignored or suppressed they usually get worse, so it's important to address them sooner rather than later.

Follow general steps to resolve relationship problems at work, while taking account of cultural safety:

1. **Self-reflect:** reflect on what you say and do, and how you watch, listen and respond to your research colleague. If you have a 'supervision mentor', this might be the time to ask advice and learn from another person's way of doing things. Do you need to adjust your communication style, interpretations and responses, actions or expectations?

2. **Talk together:** talk one-on-one and listen deeply, in a private, neutral place. Try to establish what the problems or issues are, and what may be behind them. It's important to try to understand each other's point of view.

3. **Work out ways to solve your difficulties and move forward together:** is there a solution for each issue that is within your (mutual) control? Are there things impacting on your working relationship that are causing stress for both of you? Do you need to change aspects of what you do, assume or expect from each other?

4. **Involve other people who can help:** if you can't resolve the problem between yourselves, be prepared to involve others, such as:

    - a suitably skilled colleague with whom you both feel comfortable
    - a human resources staff member or workplace counsellor
    - an Indigenous student support staff member (if in a university).

chapter 3:
academic supervision

While Indigenous students have historically been under-represented in our universities, there is a steadily growing number of Indigenous students undertaking university studies and postgraduate research. In recent decades, universities have recognised the need to improve the quality of learning experiences for Indigenous students. They are working on systems and teaching approaches that are respectful of Indigenous cultures and knowledge traditions, and more relevant to Indigenous students' experiences and worldviews. Universities have built up better services and resources to support Indigenous students and their academic supervisors.

In regard to the health research being done in universities, there is growing recognition that:

> *if universities are to play a role in bridging the Indigenous health gap, they must refocus health research processes to generate knowledge and analyse problems in a way that is appropriate and relevant to those working in the Indigenous communities, health services and the policy sector… [Universities need to help students] take the knowledge developed through research, and implement it in a real-world setting that will result in better health policies and practices for Indigenous Australians* (Anderson 2008:1).

Indigenous research students are a key to this innovation. They bring particular strengths and motivations that will help universities to meet this challenge.

> *Many Indigenous candidates are not motivated by the same things as non-Indigenous candidates. Many come with a burning desire to right wrongs and improve things for their people and are eager to be given the practical tools to achieve this* (Sharon Chirgwin, Supervisor, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory).

These characteristics provide a foundation for productive research and rewarding supervisor–researcher relationships.

Principles of best practice supervision

In *Eleven Practices of Effective Postgraduate Research Supervisors*, James and Baldwin (1999) set out six principles of effective academic supervision. The principles and processes of good academic supervision are universal, and apply when supervising *all* postgraduate students.

1. Supervision involves the fundamentals of good teaching, among them, concern for students, interest in their progress, and the provision of thoughtful and timely feedback. Good supervisors exemplify the characteristics of good teachers in any setting.

2. Supervision is an intensive form of teaching, in a broader sense than just information transfer. The sustained complexity of supervision involves much time and energy. Good supervisors are aware of this and of the professional commitment necessary to every student they agree to supervise.

3. The supervisory relationship has a particularly personal dimension, especially when students face crises of confidence or personal problems.

4. Research students are highly individual. They have different preferences, expectations of the relationship, and approaches to study, some of which may be related to their cultural background. Good supervisors recognize and value this diversity, and adjust their own practices accordingly.

5. Good supervisors extend their students well beyond what those students thought possible, by setting high but realistic standards. They encourage independence by building students' confidence in their personal research capabilities.

6. Finally, good supervisors are conscious of their mentoring role. They aim to be a model for first-rate scholarship (James & Baldwin 1999:3).

The *Eleven Practices of Effective Postgraduate Research Supervisors* can be downloaded from the Melbourne Graduate School of Education's Centre for the Study of Higher Education website: **<www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/11practices.pdf>.**

Challenges for Indigenous postgraduate research students

Academic supervision approaches need to take into account, and respect, the background of the student, the background of the supervisor and the nature of research in Indigenous health.

} See also Chapter 2, 'Workplace Supervision', **p. 13**. Many of the practical issues in the Indigenous research environment discussed in Chapter 2 are relevant to academic supervision.

The strengths and resilience that Indigenous postgraduate research students typically bring to their candidature are needed for what can be a difficult and complex journey. Some of the challenges are specific to being an Indigenous scholar researching Indigenous health in a mainstream academic setting.

> *Understanding the issues that our students face and building a safe environment that takes into account their personal circumstances and pressures is the first step in ensuring our students are given the best opportunity to reach the highest standards of scholarship. It may mean doing something different but does not mean standards need to be compromised* (Mick Gooda, Chief Executive Officer, CRCAH).

Different education backgrounds and pathways

Many Indigenous people who undertake postgraduate research are the first in their families to do so. A great many Indigenous students have to overcome the barriers to good early education that are so emblematic of the level of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Because of this history, students have limited access to Indigenous academic supervisors and Indigenous postgraduate role models. These factors add to the challenge of surviving and succeeding in postgraduate study, as well as to the motivation.

Mature age Indigenous students are blessed with the essence of life experiences and skills often acquired through the school of 'hard knocks'. The choice to participate in tertiary studies as a mature age student may result from different experiences. These may include offensive experiences in secondary education, lack of financial resources and support to continue on from secondary education, an urge to improve conditions and assist other less fortunate people or the decision to further skills after raising extended families (Wallace 2003:3).

A key challenge for universities is to embrace and support Indigenous students who may have had disadvantaged educational backgrounds without comprising the academic standards that Indigenous people have a right to expect and aspire to (IHEAC 2006:20).

A great many Indigenous students have to overcome the barriers to good early education that are so emblematic of the level of disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Different perspectives and the dominance of non-Indigenous culture

Many Indigenous students bring learning styles, expectations and cultural perspectives to higher education that differ from those of non-Indigenous students. Indigenous students are sometimes required to adjust to the norms, systems and structures of university teaching and learning in order to progress through and complete their higher education.

Many Indigenous students bring learning styles, expectations and cultural perspectives to higher education that differ from those of non-Indigenous students

My survival within the higher education system and the research academy depends on my knowing how the Western academy is structured and operates. That is, I need to know who the relevant scholars are, who controls the processes within the research academy, and ways of 'doing business'. Generally and most often such non-Indigenous peoples are 'white Australians'. Certainly this is the case within the university in which I was enrolled. This 'knowing' is more than 'knowing' your discipline.

It is also about knowing your discipline inside out, how it came to be, how it is used, and then turning it upside down so you can see how it relates back to Indigenous peoples. What I do not think is understood by the research academy is that my survival as an Aboriginal woman in the Aboriginal community, in broader society, and within higher education, also relies on my continuing to develop as an Aboriginal woman. This is not something that holds true in reverse. 'White people' do not have to work in the same way. They do not have to work on being 'white'. All the processes in place, the knowledge in place, structures, systems, other people, all remind them that they are 'white' (Monture-Angus in Fredericks 2008:115).

As well, Indigenous culture often may be overlooked in the classroom in preference to the values and expectations of the dominant culture. In their pursuit of academic integration, Indigenous students may find themselves in a difficult emotional struggle between resisting or denying their culture and the pressure of assimilation in higher education (Bourke, Burden & Moore 1996 in IHEAC 2006:22).

Universities are white, privileged spaces. Aboriginal students need a good, strong sense of self. As students (and Aboriginal students, no less), we need to be mindful of the power of whiteness and how it can invade the last of the Aboriginal territories—the mind and the body, through a process of infusion into the skin—to reinscribe or prescribe what it is and means to be Aboriginal. We need to be mindful of this so that we never lose our own sense of Aboriginal identity when working and studying in privileged white spaces.

As Aboriginal people our position is always 'problematised'—this occurs across all facets of life including the education system. I think that having a strong sense of self is important for us as Aboriginal students and researchers in order that we do not internalise and replicate the often negative white stereotypes or assumptions associated with our Aboriginality (Gilbert Gallaher, PhD graduate, Flinders University, South Australia).

Some Indigenous students find they come under intense scrutiny, as they have to overcome the negative stereotypical views that many Australians have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

> *Pressure will be put on them to have all of the answers to all of the issues, to represent, dispel the myths and justify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, when, in fact, our students just want to be students* (Mick Gooda, Chief Executive Officer, CRCAH).

Learning research culture and facing academic critique

All postgraduate students need to be exposed to research culture and academic critique. Many students find it hard to get used to the notion that their ideas, rather than the person, are being challenged. Public and published criticism can be especially humiliating for Indigenous students. It can challenge the boundaries of cultural safety and undermine academic confidence.

Preparing students to handle the critical peer review that will be part of an ongoing academic life is part of a supervisor's role. It is essential to challenge students' perspectives and coach them through these realities.

Supervisors need to debate ideas and work through challenging scenarios with students. They should be aware of how much of the challenge is coming from their own worldviews and how much is coming from different academic perspectives. Supervisors should not be reluctant to challenge Indigenous and Indigenist perspectives, but should work through barriers to good research, such as students' own emotionality and racism, and emphasise the need to respond intellectually, rather than emotionally. Not challenging students in this way can set them up to fail.

> *Academia is about argument, debate and questioning. We need to be able to ask questions and challenge things without fear of alienating ourselves from colleagues. It's really important to learn to do this because it's part of bringing about and supporting the changes that will improve health and wellbeing for people.*
>
> *Nobody tells you about the competitiveness of academia. You need to have a thick skin and you need to know what you are getting into. It's really only when you are working in that environment day-to-day that you start to understand what it's about, and how people depend on publications for career development. Most of us don't get guidance in that aspect and it's very important. We need to learn to be diplomatic and strategic, to seek out who we need to work with to achieve what we want to achieve* (Chris Lawrence, PhD student, The University of Sydney).

Students can get feedback to strengthen their work by presenting it in Indigenous-dominated, culturally safer environments (e.g. forums and conferences that are specific to Indigenous studies, knowledge and research) before presenting it in the wider public domain.

A powerful emotional journey

For many Indigenous students, doing the research means studying material that has been written about their own people and circumstances. This can be quite confronting and have personal impact.

> *In studying the texts that have been written about them, [Indigenous] scholars are negotiating with representations of themselves, their ancestors and their experiences. Negotiating these texts is not simply an intellectual process. It is also an emotional journey that often involves outrage, pain, anger, humiliation, guilt, anxiety and depression* (Nakata 1998:4).

Walking between two knowledge systems

Students who are doing research that involves Indigenous knowledge need to work through cultural and custodian protocols. They can face dilemmas about their 'right to know'. They are at risk of reading information in published texts that is not meant for them. Ma Rhea tells the story of a confident Indigenous scholar in this situation:

> *[She had been] doing some research for a paper about Aboriginal health and had come across some information about her community that she had no right to know. She became very upset about this and eventually went home to ask forgiveness from her Elders for now having this knowledge. Her Elders were also upset that this knowledge was to be found in a library in a book and withdrew their support for her study. Consequently, she did not return to the university* (Ma Rhea & Rigney 2002:17).

There are issues about what can and cannot be written; a student's 'writing problem' could be underpinned by issues about his or her right to speak (Ma Rhea & Rigney 2002). The student might have gathered important cultural information that he or she cannot reproduce in university records, or cannot talk about with academic supervisors. Supervisors need to be aware of this, and not pressure students to act in ways that damage Indigenous cultural values or threaten cultural safety.

} See *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers*, Part A, 'Indigenous Health Research in Context'

Language takes on diverse nuances of meaning in different cultures and environments. When reading and reviewing literature and writing theses, Indigenous candidates often need to express nuances of meaning that are important in one culture in the language of another. For those Indigenous research candidates who are more comfortable with an oral tradition of knowledge rather than the Western written tradition, this can present an additional challenge.

Carrying the weight of responsibility

There can be many pressures on Indigenous postgraduate students. They often have leadership roles and multiple responsibilities. Many have been encouraged by Elders to continue with their university studies, despite good job opportunities, because their research projects are seen as important to their communities.

Indigenous candidates who are researching their communities' knowledge systems become identified as a valuable resource to community business. These students can be drawn into the community's agendas for political action, placing further pressure on them. A supervisor may need to negotiate with students and, through them, with their communities, for the time and space needed to complete their studies (Henry & Institute of Koorie Education 2007:159).

Finding the right supervisor

Finding the right supervisor is crucial for any postgraduate student. It is a particular challenge for many Indigenous postgraduate research students. Ideally, students need an academic supervisor with relevant expertise and a shared interest in the area of research, who is able to understand Indigenous ways of doing things and can help the student incorporate this into the research methodology and approach. Or they need two or more supervisors who, together, can offer this guidance. There are not enough Indigenous postgraduate supervisors available, and few non-Indigenous supervisors have this knowledge and experience.

Ideally, students need an academic supervisor with relevant expertise and a shared interest in the area of research, who is able to understand Indigenous ways of doing things and can help the student incorporate this into the research methodology and approach

The student has often thought long and hard about the potential supervisor before making an approach to undertake postgraduate work. We feel it is important to stress that it is a privilege for a non-Indigenous supervisor to be approached by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student wanting to undertake higher degree research…

It is critical in the early stages of the relationship to find out about each other's research approach and also to decide whether both parties feel comfortable about working together. It is also critical to recognise that the… student may have approached a potential supervisor based on the quality of their understanding of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander issues rather than because of their research expertise (Ma Rhea & Rigney 2002:10, 11).

Depending on the research, some students will need to trust that a supervisor has Indigenous knowledge or to feel they can trust a supervisor with it. Many students need to feel confident that their supervisors can develop respectful and culturally safe relationships with members of an Indigenous Advisory Group and communities involved in the research.

Gilbert Gallaher
Photo: Chris Wilson

Case story—What students look for in a supervisor

Gilbert Gallaher is a descendant of the Wangan nation of central Queensland (Claremont). He recently completed Doctor of Public Health studies in the Faculty of Medicine, Department of Public Health, at Flinders University. The title of his thesis is 'Getting under Our Skin: Self-reported experiences of racism and their impact on health for urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.

Gilbert talks about what students look for in an academic supervisor:

Indigenous postgraduate students need supervisors who encourage that Aboriginal sense of self, who strengthen your arguments and won't cut you down. You need someone who can use theory to deconstruct your arguments, not personal criticism.

It is difficult to get an Aboriginal supervisor. One approach is to have a [non-Indigenous] academic supervisor and an Aboriginal cultural supervisor. There can be conflicting and competing interests in this, issues related to respect and cultural issues—we need to take into account the advice of the Aboriginal supervisor even if it sometimes goes against academic interests. What we write, we want to benefit the mob. And we need to be careful that it doesn't do any damage to the mob either, especially if we are researching sensitive topics. A student needs to be savvy to navigate through the complexities.

Dismissing an idea or argument is a problem for all students to deal with, but for Aboriginal students trying to fit into the academy it sends a message that your ideas are not worthy. It raises self-doubt

An academic supervisor needs to be prepared to set aside time and a safe space, to be welcoming and encouraging. The relationship needs to be open and trusting, you need a natural rapport. The supervisor needs to be able to listen, to engage in what the student is saying and not be dismissive. Dismissing an idea or argument is a problem for all students to deal with, but for Aboriginal students trying to fit into the academy it sends a message that your ideas are not worthy. It raises self-doubt. 'Am I good enough?' You need a tough skin.

Supervisors also need to identify their own vulnerability and any awkwardness about being a supervisor to an Aboriginal student. One of the things that can tire a student is that we also have to educate our supervisors on matters pertaining to our subject position as Aboriginal people.

The burden of these responsibilities falls back on the Indigenous person—they end up carrying more weight and their passion can be stifled. We need to be tenacious, to dig our heels in… to be able to weather the storm, push our way through and get on with our studies.

When I selected my primary academic supervisor I already knew of her work and we had personal dealings from working together. I trusted her and I felt safe. She was reflexive and switched on. We would meet formally about once a month, but in reality we talked about my research more often—probably weekly—because we worked together. We both attended the Melbourne Summer School for Indigenous Postgraduate Students and it was fantastic—it really went through the 'nuts and bolts' for Indigenous postgraduate students and their supervisors. All Indigenous research students and supervisors should have this sort of program.

Bronwyn Fredericks

Case story—The academic supervisor–student relationship

Bronwyn Fredericks is a NHMRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow with the International Public Health Unit, Monash University, and the NHMRC Centre for Clinical Research Excellence within the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council. She has been actively involved with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based organisations for more than twenty-five years.

Bronwyn has written about looking for reciprocity in the academic supervisor–student relationship:

I knew what I did not want and I knew what I did want. I knew that I would accept university-based supervisors who would be respectful of me, of my positioning; supervisors who were respectful of difference, who accepted my difference and who did not make me hide my difference, who would not make me 'fit' but who would encourage me and show where I could find a place for myself. I knew that I wanted open and heartfelt communication in my relationships with all my supervisors. I knew that I was prepared to gift the university-based supervisors with knowledge and wisdom that I can give, in reciprocity for their wisdom and increased knowledge of the research academy.

In this way, we would be learning from one another in the true sense of teaching and learning, engaging one another in open critical dialogue where we could hear and come to know one another. It could be, I thought, an intersection of possibilities for us. I also thought that, for some people, it would be an intersection that they would fear and by which they would feel threatened. I knew I was prepared to gift them the status of being the supervisors of an Aboriginal woman who gains a PhD from the university just as they were gifting me their skills, time and status of their supervision (Fredericks 2008:122).

Tips for academic supervisors

Postgraduate supervision is a complex form of teaching. Your academic supervision role includes guidance of the student's research management, academic development and research training, and support for his or her social and emotional wellbeing.

Many things impact on the way a postgraduate student approaches his or her research and academic life. They include motives for study, learning style, level of confidence, past experiences, knowledge and skill levels, ideological perspectives, cultural background and gender (James & Baldwin 1999:9). You need to take into account the factors that impact on many Indigenous postgraduate students (as discussed) and get to know the individual student in order to fulfil your supervision role effectively and to build a productive supervisor–researcher relationship.

Before you start the supervisor–student partnership

When considering whether to supervise any student, you ask yourself if you have the right disciplinary background, methodological expertise, specific interest and time to supervise the student's research. Ma Rhea & Rigney (2002) suggest questions for non-Indigenous academic supervisors who are considering supervision of Indigenous students doing research in Indigenous communities:

1. What is my attitude towards Indigenous people and my understanding of Indigenous culture? How will my views affect my working relationship with this student? How will the student 'read' me?
2. How flexible am I about methodology or approach? Am I able to help the student explore research methods that are culturally safe for the people involved in the study?
3. How does my worldview shape my approach to research and to knowledge? How can I come to know this student's worldview? And how will differing worldviews affect the supervisory relationship?
4. Am I confident I can contribute to the student's academic development? How open am I to learning and developing research relationships in the research community?
5. Am I prepared to be both expert and learner? (adapted from Ma Rhea & Rigney 2002:12, 13).

You both need to feel comfortable about working together. Supervision involves getting to know the student and assessing his or her academic needs, so that you can facilitate a rigorous academic process. It involves a common academic interest and mutual enthusiasm in the study, and, while the relationship is central, it is about being colleagues rather than being friends.

> *Don't go looking for a friend in a supervisor. You need someone who is professional and respectful, and there needs to be good rapport between you both, but that's different to being a friend* (Chris Lawrence, PhD student, The University of Sydney).

In addition to establishing how often to meet, timelines and flexibility for submitting written work, and how much guidance and direction the student needs and can expect, you will need to establish things like:

- whether there are intercultural issues that need to be talked about
- connections the student might have to the communities where the research will be done and whether there is a supervisory role for Indigenous community members involved in the research
- meeting Indigenous community expectations and protocols
- funding of the research (especially if it involves travel to remote areas) (adapted from Ma Rhea & Rigney 2002:14).

On the choice of a co-supervisor or supervision team, a complementary range of skills is needed. Establish whether supervision in cultural protocols is necessary for the research project. If a cultural supervisor is not a university staff member, how will the supervision be arranged and how will the role be recognised by the university?

To recognise the centrality of this Aboriginal knowledge community dimension to the candidates' studies, we have acknowledged Elders in each candidate's community as Indigenous community supervisors through a formal procedure within our university

To recognise the centrality of this Aboriginal knowledge community dimension to the candidates' studies, we have acknowledged Elders in each candidate's community as Indigenous community supervisors through a formal procedure within our university. Thus the supervisory team has been expanded—two university based co-supervisors (one an Aboriginal academic, the other a non-Aboriginal academic) and one Aboriginal community based supervisor. For this supervisory arrangement to work productively for the candidate, the university-based supervisors—and in particular the non-Aboriginal supervisor—must accept that they are only part of the supervision team required for the candidate's successful completion (Henry & Institute of Koorie Education 2007:162).

It may be necessary to advocate, within your own university, for flexible supervision arrangements that adequately meet the student's cultural supervision needs.

Finally, make sure you have the time to provide good practice supervision.

The PhD process is daunting and it can be hard sometimes to maintain the momentum through to completion. I had great supervisors who were really supportive throughout the whole process. But sometimes, like a colleague of mine, major delays are caused by supervisors—things like when you submit work for them to review and there are delays in receiving comments back. From talking to other PhD students, it appears some supervisors don't have the time to supervise, but they will still take you on (Sanchia Shibasaki, PhD graduate, Australian National University).

Be familiar with the body of work by Indigenous academics about Indigenous research reform agendas and seek advice

During the academic supervision process

As the student's research proceeds, consider intercultural issues while facilitating robust research and rigorous study standards. Depending on the student's area of study, you may need to be familiar with the body of work by Indigenous academics about Indigenous research reform agendas and to seek advice from Indigenous colleagues within the university.

Indigenous postgraduate researchers are typically intensely engaged in their research, committed to Indigenous health and issues, and determined to make a difference.

This drive provides opportunities to engage with ideas and arguments and the research interests you have in common.

> *It's such an exciting area [of study] that we are both so enthusiastic about, an area that can't help but be both challenging and rewarding… We're just incredibly lucky that we have this mutual enthusiasm that we're working on—I think that drives a lot of it* (Bart Currie, Supervisor, Northern Territory).

A high level of student motivation can be challenging for supervisors, as well as rewarding. Determination to make a difference can lead to some Indigenous students wanting to take on overly complex research projects.

> *While supervisors usually encounter this with all candidates to some extent, it is made more challenging when the project is tied into complex cultural issues, or family and community experiences, or both* (Sharon Chirgwin, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, Northern Territory).

Doctoral programs are opportunities for the production of new knowledge and new intellectual work.

> *[Candidates who ground their studies in their own cultural knowledge systems] design and implement research projects that are interventions into contemporary Australian society as experienced by Indigenous Australians. The interventions are required to be compatible with Aboriginal ethical conduct; be informed by Aboriginal cultural ways of being, knowing and acting; and ameliorate the individualistic dimension of university-based doctoral studies. In addition, they must contribute to knowledge production within their own Aboriginal knowledge communities and, then, make a contribution to the academic discipline* (Henry & Institute of Koorie Education 2007:157).

This means there can be competing interests in the research. For example, a student might find himself or herself torn between a new direction that community members want the research to take, and the research question or academic process on which the candidature is based. In such a scenario, it is important to keep the student focused on meeting academic assessment requirements. Be clear that a successful thesis is not reliant on running a successful research project, but on demonstrating an academic process that is conducted, documented and interpreted rigorously. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the tension this causes, and to support the student to uphold Indigenous research values and manage communication with research stakeholders in the community.

Supervisors often need to guide the candidate to refine a writing style that is sensitive to the nuances of meaning in Indigenous culture and language, while meeting the expectations of scholarly writing. It may require different supervision strategies.

> *I have seen the benefit of… sessions with a mentor [which] sometimes focus on relating the findings of existing theory and research to the candidate's developing argument, and sometimes on the candidate's writing about Indigenous knowledge and experience. Together with supervision, this may assist some Indigenous researchers develop a clear and distinctive voice that expresses the meanings of both cultures (or academies) and speaks to the expectations of the Western academic tradition* (Guin Threlkeld with Judy Cue, La Trobe University, Victoria).

Indigenous postgraduate researchers are typically intensely engaged in their research, committed to Indigenous health and issues, and determined to make a difference

Sanchia Shibasaki

Case story—A student's experience of best practice academic supervision

Sanchia Shibasaki was enrolled at the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute at the Australian National University. Sanchia is from Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. She has experience as a clinician and researcher in Indigenous health and primary health care. Her PhD, the Information Atlas Project, aimed to identify the strategic information management practices needed by primary health care services to provide chronic disease management, with emphasis on diabetes patient management.

Sanchia writes about the guidance provided by her panel of supervisors.

During my candidature I lived in Brisbane and was enrolled as an external PhD student at the Australian National University. My PhD supervision involved a panel of three supervisors: one principal supervisor, Associate Professor Bev Sibthorpe, and two advisory supervisors, Professor Nicholas Glasgow and Associate Professor John Condon. Bev was based in Newcastle, Nick in Canberra and John in Darwin. Whilst I had limited face-to-face contact with each of my supervisors, I received excellent support from each of them via phone calls and emails.

When you talk about supervisors you are told, and read about, how important supervisors are to your PhD journey but I don't think it sinks in until you are about twelve to twenty-four months into the process. My panel was excellent. Bev was an absolute guru and continues to be a fantastic mentor. She advised me to keep a diary of my journey, particularly when I was out in the field, and told me to self-reflect on each day. These notes were particularly helpful when I was writing up my thesis because they helped me to put the pieces together so that I could tell a coherent story about what I was investigating. It's so easy when you get closer to the end to go off on a tangent, particularly when you discover something interesting but that is not relevant to your main research questions.

I also submitted chunks of my work to my supervisory panel for review and comment and had planning meetings to discuss each stage of my project. I think these sessions were particularly beneficial because I had to listen to comments that were a critical assessment of my work, I had to teach myself about how to take these comments onboard without feeling bad or being reactive, and most importantly I started to compare the way my supervisors thought about things and the way they did things with the way I was raised to think about things and how we tended to do things back home.

When I got to the final draft of my thesis, I sent it to Nick and John and they assessed it from an examiner's point of view. Before I submitted we decided to send the draft to a professional editor. The editing process was quite daunting—I'm still recovering from it and would prefer not to comment about this process for the time being.

Encourage the student to find a mentor or 'critical friend' to help tackle the complexities of bringing together non-Indigenous scholarly literature and Indigenous knowledge and meaning

Guiding students' research management and academic development

- Make use of the services and study centres the university has in place to support Indigenous students. They offer students personal support and networks, as well as academic skills support.
- Encourage the student to find a mentor or 'critical friend' to help tackle the complexities of bringing together non-Indigenous scholarly literature and Indigenous knowledge and meaning.
- Consider setting up a small Indigenous reference group (three people) to help balance the research and give feedback on the research process. This is in addition, and complementary to, the supervisor/s.
- Encourage the student to write early and often. Review writing at an early stage and help the student find a 'voice' or style. Direct the student to resources/courses/people to help with writing development if needed (including Indigenous student resources and/or an Indigenous academic mentor).
- Be specific about how to improve the study; give feedback that stretches and extends the student. Be sensitive to the student's concerns and doubts; focus on the things that are going well and on the student's strengths and resilience.
- Have regular contact to keep momentum going and help the student stay on course. When you monitor progress in a vigilant way, interventions can be made when they are most needed.
- Get the student involved in the life of the department. This is really important. He/she needs to feel part of the academic community to feel accepted by staff as an equal.
- Encourage the student to build networks with other postgraduate students and staff members. When you pass on information about academic and professional groups, include networks such as the National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation (NIPAAC) and any Indigenous-specific research networks.
- Discuss the nature of academic culture and research culture with students. Prepare students for peer review and academic criticism. Be explicit—work through scenarios. Challenge the student's ideas and encourage debate. Establish a safe space to work through these processes.
- Offer opportunities to attend professional forums and conferences.

Supporting students' social and emotional wellbeing

- Offer help if academic, personal or family crises arise, and be aware that a personal crisis can sometimes be based in the research project. Whether the student comes to you in a crisis and whether you pick up on problems will depend largely on how well you know the student and your skills in listening, observing and empathising, as well as the type of problem and the type of relationship you develop. Helping students through these crises can be crucial to whether or not they continue their candidature.
- Ensure that the student is not 'suffering in silence', especially at the beginning of candidature when a student is likely to feel anxious and uncertain about what lies ahead and does not yet have a wide circle of support within the university. Worry and stress is unhealthy for anyone and needs to be dealt with.
- Don't assume support is coming from other students. Know what support is offered through the Indigenous student services in your university. Make sure students have informal advice to support their wellbeing *and* professional advice to support their study.
- For many students, maintaining connections with their own communities will be important, especially if they are studying away from Country and/or community for a long time. You might like to talk about ways of sharing information about their study with their community (for example, include a student profile or update about the research in a community newsletter).

} See also 'Practical issues in the Indigenous research environment' in Chapter 2, 'Workplace Supervision', **p. 24**.

In the final stages of candidature

Towards the end of candidature, your supervision will be focused on making recommendations for the final production and presentation of the research. Your career development role will also come into focus.

You will be aware of the motivation that is driving the student through postgraduate study. You will have talked about what the student is hoping to do with the completed research and any impact it may have on current employment. Part of your role is to give career advice and support, and to talk about different options that could open up to the student after graduation. Talk about opportunities in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous sectors. Encourage the candidate to seek other professional advice, as well—being a good researcher is not necessarily the same thing as being a good career advisor.

There are other ways you can help the student's career at this stage, such as supporting publication and presentation opportunities, introducing contacts, supporting grant applications and being a referee for relevant job applications.

Resources for supervisors and postgraduate students

In addition to the resources and professional development activities available to academic supervisors and postgraduate research students within your university, there are other programs and resources specifically developed for Indigenous candidates and their supervisors. They include the following.

National Indigenous Postgraduate Association Aboriginal Corporation

Membership of NIPAAC is open to Indigenous Australian postgraduate students, Elders and ex-postgraduate students.

The aims of NIPAAC are:

to provide a network for Indigenous postgraduate students

to act as advocate for and to represent the interests of Indigenous postgraduate students at a national level

to promote reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples of Australia

to promote research into Indigenous issues and the training of Indigenous researchers

to educate researchers on appropriate protocols when dealing with issues of cultural and social significance to Indigenous peoples

to liaise with universities, governments, and other national associations with a view promoting these objectives

to promote the participation by Indigenous people as equals in a national community of postgraduate scholarship

to be a constituent organisation of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA), and adhere to the Constitution of CAPA and resolutions of its Council and Executive (NIPAAC n.d.).

Web: **www.nipaac.edu.au**
Email: **nipaac@capa.edu.au**

Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia Summer School for Indigenous Postgraduate Students

The Indigenous Postgraduate Summer School is a five-day residential program held each February. It brings together Australian Indigenous postgraduate students and their supervisors with a distinguished faculty of senior Indigenous scholars and Fellows from the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. The purpose of the Summer School is to provide students with the knowledge, skills and mentoring to help them towards successful completion of their postgraduate degrees and furthering of their careers.

The Summer School is hosted by the Centre for Indigenous Education and the Australian Indigenous Studies Program at the University of Melbourne, in conjunction with the CRC for Aboriginal Health and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia.

Web: **www.assaipss.org.au**
Tel: **+61 3 8344 0451**

I found the Summer School very beneficial as it allowed me to network with other Indigenous students and help relieve the sense of isolation you feel as a student. I was able to discuss my topic with other students doing similar work as me. It also helped me reflect on the process I have been through so far with my studies and gave me more confidence to do the final write up of my thesis. It was also good to have the advice from other academics who had been through the process and were able to give me valuable tips on how to complete my studies (Chelsea Bond, PhD student, The University of Queensland).

James Cook University student Roianne West (right) with supervisor Kim Usher at 2009 ASSA Summer School

Indigenous Studies Research Network, Indigenous Methodologies Module

The Indigenous Methodologies Module is an intensive three-day master class. It targets postgraduate students and early career researchers and is open to Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers from across Australia. The Module provides scholars with a set of methodologies informed by an Indigenous interpretative framework, and the skills to integrate Indigenous methodologies into their own research work.

The Indigenous Methodologies Module is hosted by the Indigenous Studies Research Network at Queensland University of Technology, in partnership with the University of Tasmania and with support from the Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd. Venues include Curtin University of Technology and the University of Newcastle in 2009, and Northern Territory and Queensland venues in 2010.

Web: **www.isrn.qut.edu.au**
Email: **isrn@qut.edu.au**
Tel: **+61 7 3138 8611**

Statement of Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study

The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations' *2004 Statement of Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study* (CAPA 2004) lists specific induction needs, categories of advice needed by research students, and things that should be covered in agreements between the postgraduate student and supervisor.

The statement includes guidelines for study space, study environment, other facilities and resources, and examination. For the full statement, contact the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations or download from the website.

Web: **www.capa.edu.au**
Tel: **+61 3 9650 7666**

part b:
workplace strategies and resources

Workplace supervision is different to academic supervision. The workplace processes described in this part of the guide apply mainly to workplace supervisors, rather than academic supervisors, because they focus on employment processes for emerging Indigenous researchers.

All types of research workplaces have the potential to build on existing structures and policies to support emerging Indigenous researchers. Good practice support happens when workplaces offer good planning and preparation, which involves:

- being clear that your project will take on and support an emerging indigenous researcher (or researchers)
- being clear about the benefits this brings for the community, the Indigenous researcher, the research team and research outcomes
- being clear about what the emerging researcher/s will be doing
- thinking through how the organisation's structure, policies and processes can best be used to support emerging researchers with good supervision and professional development opportunities
- thinking through how Indigenous values, Indigenous knowledge and worldviews will be respected in research approaches and team relationships
- working out how to identify learning needs, develop skills and give support
- making sure experienced researchers are willing and able to give the supervision, support and time needed
- planning for selection and recruitment
- allowing time for recruitment, training, support and mentoring in the project timeline
- planning for resource needs (including office space, furniture, equipment, transport)
- accurate costing—all the costs of supporting an emerging researcher need to be included in the project budget. In a funding environment where organisations often need to compete for research funding, it is especially important that submissions truly reflect infrastructure and resource needs.

Good workplace supervision includes:

- regular professional supervision of the research
- awareness of issues and practical strategies in the Indigenous research environment
- one-on-one guidance based on individual background and skills, two-way learning and quality role models.

When there is academic supervision, it involves:

- principles of best practice academic supervision
- effective supervision practices through all stages of the study.

Good support involves:

- workplace systems, policies and resources set up to support emerging Indigenous researchers
- workplace systems, policies and resources set up to support research supervisors in their supervision role
- support from organisational values and management approach
- one-on-one support from the research leader or supervisor
- support from other team members
- support for establishing professional networks beyond the organisation.

Good training and professional development includes:

- on-the-job training
- mentoring (see Chapter 7, 'Training and Professional Development', **p. 125**)
- other training and development activities
- career planning

(adapted from Watson & Harrison 2006).

Workplace management systems need to:

- work properly
- be understood by everyone
- be organised around support and training needs
- recognise that management/supervision skills are different to research skills or community engagement skills. (Expert researchers should not be assumed to be expert managers of emerging Indigenous researchers.)

Part B of the guide suggests strategies and tools to help bring these elements together in the research workplace.

chapter 4:
planning the research job and recruiting the researcher

Most Indigenous health research involves the employment of Indigenous researchers. There is a highly competitive market for trained Indigenous researchers—finding the right Indigenous researcher (or researchers) for your project can be a challenge. This chapter will help you think clearly about what the research job is, what skills are needed to do it and some of the issues involved in planning long-distance supervision. It has tips for designing a research job and recruiting Indigenous researchers.

What does the research job involve?

Often research positions are funded and created without thinking through what the Indigenous researcher will be doing and the skills that are really needed. In Aboriginal health, the research role is likely to be broad and involve more than academic research skills and techniques.

> *The role of the Indigenous researcher is often undervalued by investigators. When it comes to preparing grant proposals and designing the research, the non-Indigenous researchers may do a lot of the writing, but the Indigenous researcher brings the substance. If you haven't got support from the Indigenous community, you haven't got the project. We call, talk, explain and build trust in the research. People may not know the research leader, but they will know me.*
>
> *A lot of time is needed to facilitate and mediate the research process with Indigenous stakeholders. There is a lot of explaining to do, about the project and also about contemporary research practice and how it's different from the past. People are often suspicious about how research is conducted and what will happen to the data. As the Indigenous researcher, you need to spend a lot of time talking to people* (Kim O'Donnell, Flinders University, South Australia).

A community worker might take on research as part of his or her role (e.g. a health care worker involved in a work-related research project). You need to think about the tensions and dilemmas that could arise between the two parts of the job, such as trying to manage a clinical workload while finding time for research processes, or confidentiality issues that may arise when people are both research participants and clients.

Designing the job

Good research job design is essential. You can design the job by doing a job analysis, which is a systematic way of building up a detailed picture of a job from the research proposal or project plan. This process has many uses before the project begins and after the researcher starts.

Job analysis helps you think carefully about what the researcher will be doing, and what is required of him or her in order to do that particular job well. It is used to write an accurate job description and develop selection criteria, and to set up a clear and credible process for assessing the merit of applicants.

Job analysis can be the base for structuring and preparing for your supervision and support role because it gives important information about:

- minimum knowledge, skills and experience needed to do the job
- personal attributes or qualities that would help the person to do the job
- what needs to be mastered first to get the research under way
- priorities for on-the-job training and mentoring.

From this information, you can draw up a *provisional framework* for training an emerging Indigenous researcher as part of the project plan.

} See 'Case Study—Designing on-the-job research training' in Chapter 7, 'Training and Professional Development', **p. 159**.

Job analysis helps you to identify:

- materials needed in the orientation and induction package
- what to cover in the induction training program
- possible support issues
- the level of supervision and support required to do the research job.

It helps you in other ways, too. It identifies areas where you might need to call on expertise from other researchers and highlights areas of knowledge and communication where, as a non-Indigenous researcher, you will need to ask, listen, watch and learn from your Indigenous colleague.

The job analysis is used when the researcher joins the team. It becomes the base for:

- assessing the merit of applicants and selecting the best person for the job
- doing an individual skills audit to work out training needs during orientation
- standards or benchmarks used in performance appraisal.

Follow your workplace procedure for analysing and writing up new jobs. The example in the 'How to do a job analysis' box has an Indigenous community research focus.

How to do a job analysis

1 Decide who needs to be involved in the job analysis process
Who else will know what the new researcher needs to do, and how it needs to be done, such as Indigenous community members or experts in this area of health or research practice?

2 Decide the best ways to involve people

- Should people be actively involved in job planning sessions, or consulted along the way?
- What are the best processes for community input?

3 Put together information about the research job
Base this on the research aims and the project brief. Break down each task to a level of detail that lists the different elements so you can see what knowledge, skills and qualities are really needed.

Consider things like:

- who the research stakeholders are and how the researcher will work with them
- Indigenous and community knowledge the researcher needs to have or develop
- working relationships with others on the project team
- resources needed to do the work.

4 Sort the job information

a. group the work tasks into types of work, e.g. fieldwork, organisation and administration, communication.

b. cross out any unnecessary tasks or actions.

c. describe complicated tasks in a simpler way

d. write the types of work in order, starting with the most important.

5 Sort the resources information

List the resources needed under headings, such as:

- workspace, equipment and communication
- transport and travel needs
- people needed for support in different areas of work—internal and external contacts
- other resources, e.g. data analysis software, access to library.

6 List the knowledge, skills and other qualities needed by the researcher

Steps 1–5 provide a picture of the research work and the setting, which identifies the knowledge, skills and values the person needs to have, or learn, to do the job well. For example:

- Indigenous community knowledge, perspectives, values, communication skills
- skills to work collaboratively in the research team
- willingness to do further training and professional development.

Job description

Your organisation will have its own procedure and template for writing the job description. Describe the job in language that suits the educational background of the person you are looking for.

Indigenous selection criteria

Selection criteria can make it clear that an Indigenous voice and way of working are essential for doing the research work. Selection criteria may specify, for example:

- able to understand and represent Indigenous needs and aspirations
- experience living within the framework of Indigenous cultural values within the Indigenous community
- experience using Indigenous research methodology
- experience using Indigenous communication styles, working through Indigenous networks and representing Indigenous perspectives
- able to work successfully within Indigenous networks, values and cultural frameworks
- well-developed knowledge of, experience in and acceptance by Aboriginal communities to have input in community research partnerships
- understanding of Aboriginal community culture, social and community representative structures, and protocols and networks.

Make the Indigenous selection criteria prominent rather than an add-on.

Jobs can also be identified as Indigenous positions under the relevant section of the Anti-Discrimination or Equal Opportunity Act that applies in your state or territory. They still need to include Indigenous selection criteria. For example, an 'identified' research officer position in the Faculty of Medicine at The University of Melbourne asked for applicants with:

- a demonstrated knowledge and understanding of Indigenous societies and cultures and the issues affecting these societies
- a demonstrated ability to communicate sensitively and effectively with Indigenous people
- demonstrated experience in working with Indigenous communities
- demonstrated experience in networking with local Indigenous communities.

Avoid an approach that simply takes an 'off-the-shelf' job description and applies the exemption under the *Anti-Discrimination Act*. This is unlikely to reflect what the Indigenous researcher will actually do in the job, nor will it provide criteria against which the merit of applicants can be properly assessed. This means the selection process will be compromised and you will not appoint the best person for the research job (unless by chance!).

Level of pay

Both professional and traditional knowledge need to be recognised in pay levels for Indigenous researchers. This is an important issue—in Western culture, specialised knowledge has a monetary value. It is well recognised that the under-valuing of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives is a barrier to the reforms that are needed in Indigenous health research (Dunbar *et al*. 2003:x).

Pay rates should:

- consider equity within the research team
- recognise knowledge, responsibility, skills, labour and relevant training (Rea & Young 2006:53)
- offer competitive incentives to apply for and stay in the position. Changes of staff cause interruptions to the research. They mean more time and project resources are spent on recruitment and training.

A 'Schedule of Rates of Pay for Aboriginal Workers in Research' (hourly rates) has been developed, in collaboration with other organisations, by the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre. The 2007–08 rates can be downloaded from its website **<http://desertknowledgecrc.com.au/socialscience/downloads/payratesAborresearctemplate.pdf>**.

Pay guidelines based on educational qualifications are unlikely to put a value on the specialised knowledge that is developed through Indigenous knowledge traditions. For guidance about pay, ask people in your research networks. Contact organisations that might have information available, such as:

- Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre **(http://desertknowledgecrc.com.au/)**
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies **(www.aiatsis.gov.au)**.

This poster is part of the report on a two-day workshop with The National Centre of Science, Information and Communication Technology, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia. 10 YACI consultants met at Charles Darwin University to discuss maths and maths education in their communities **(www.cdu.edu.au/centres/macp/resources.html)**

Case story—Acknowledging specialised traditional knowledge and complex research skills

The Yolngu [*sic*] Aboriginal Consultants Initiative (YACI) is an emerging group of Indigenous consultants who are involved in collaborative research and consultancies run through the School of Australian Indigenous Knowledge Systems at Charles Darwin University. Some of the consultants are members of various Yolngu clan groups whose traditional lands are in Northeast Arnhemland—including Gälpu, Djambarrpuyngu, Gupapuyngu, Gumatj and Warramiri. Others are from Ngukurr, Darwin and other places.

[The] bicultural consultants in the Indigenous Consultancy Initiative are working at a quite different level from simple expertise in their own fields. They are attending to the philosophical complexities of transdisciplinary research involving Aboriginal knowledge practices, and through this work, developing complex methodologies which identify address and document ethical, and epistemological issues throughout the process...

Aboriginal knowledge is understood to be owned and traditional regimes of authority and rights over knowledge find their place in cross-cultural consultancies…. The consultants engaged in the initiative also see themselves as highly accountable to their people, and take great care to negotiate properly within the community so as to avoid repercussions... [They] have their own traditional politics of engagement (Greaterex & Christie 2008:24–5).

Funding bodies pay YACI consultants professional consultancy fees because they have specialised skills and knowledge, they work hard and the work they do is unique.

See the YACI website for more information: **<www.cdu.edu.au/yaci>**.

Advertising the vacancy

While it can be useful to advertise vacancies through your usual places and broad media, such as newspapers, it is likely that the Indigenous people you are targeting will be found through other media and networks.

Some options for advertising locally are:

- local employment agencies
- to work through local networks (including researcher networks), word-of-mouth and email
- community noticeboards and newsletters
- local media—newspapers, broadcasting
- Indigenous education and support units within universities and training colleges
- community websites or websites of local services
- to go to meetings of community groups and talk about the work
- to describe the research project and job on film or DVD, and to distribute this to relevant groups
- to hold a (well-publicised) information session about the research job.

Some options for advertising widely are:

- National Indigenous Times **(www.nit.com.au/jobs)**
- Koori Mail **(www.koorimail.com)**
- other national and local newspapers
- university and student newsletters/websites
- professional journals
- workplace newsletters and websites
- online job advertising
- online newsletters and professional networks
- national and state/territory Indigenous health networks (e.g. CRCAH).

When you advertise a research job vacancy:

- allow plenty of time for recruitment
- avoid advertising in school holidays.

A program coordinator for Aboriginal health in regional New South Wales explains one advertising experience:

> *Our most successful [advertising] was through the Koori networks, through the emails—sending it out, you know, to the list I had and then just asking people to forward it on and just gave a bit of blurb about it and attached some information about it. [We] gave them contact details and the other thing was that I was the contact person for the positions and it was clearly identified that I am an Aboriginal person and so there was a whole stack of phone calls about 'What is it about?' [We had] really informal kinds of discussions.*

Selection and recruitment

Most organisations have their own rules and procedures for selecting staff. These procedures can be applied in a way that ensures you recruit the right person for the Indigenous health research job.

Setting up a selection panel

When a selection panel is needed, the group of people you bring together to select the researcher/s will usually need some knowledge and experience in:

- relevant Indigenous health issues
- the type of research to be conducted
- representing the community (or communities) involved in the research
- conditions and details of employment.

Consider things like gender and age of panel members if a particular perspective is important for selecting the right person (e.g. young person for a young person's study, an Elder to represent community values).

Depending on the research project and the researcher's role, you might want to take other advice, involve other people, or take other steps as needed. For example:

- involve members of the Indigenous reference group or advisory committee
- take interviewees to meet community Elders
- be guided by information you already have from research participants or partners about what to look for in the researcher.

What is most important is that any selection process:

- is accountable to the Indigenous community and/or the organisations involved in the research
- treats people in a fair and equitable way
- has the best chance of choosing the right person for the job.

> Our most successful [advertising] was through the Koori networks, through the emails—sending it out... just asking people to forward it on

Case story—Recruitment and training of peer interviewers

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service undertook a study of the health and wellbeing of young Koori people in Melbourne, as explained by researchers **Reg Thorpe** from VAHS and **Paul Stewart** from Onemda.

The Koori and non-Aboriginal research team planned a qualitative first stage with a series of focus group discussions with young people and in-depth interviews with adults in the community who had contact with young people. The team used these activities to help clearly define the research questions and to design an effective research questionnaire.

The interviews and focus group discussions advised the team to use peer interviewers:

You probably should have a Koori person with you. A young person who knows what's going on, they can generally say, 'Come on cuz if you don't want to answer it doesn't matter, but we'd like you to answer. That's what it's all about' and they talk in their own language… (Holmes *et al.* 2002:1272).

The research team used community links and networks to recruit peer interviewers. The tasks and payment were explained to young people who showed interest. Those who were willing to administer the questionnaire and health check were taken on. Peer interviewers helped to recruit other young people by 'spreading the word'.

We recruited a total of 18 young people as peer interviewers. They were of different ages, both sexes, living in a range of suburbs, and representing different family groups and networks. We trained them to administer the questionnaire and conduct a health check, and provided each with a detailed manual. They received payment for each interview and for their expenses. Some had large social networks and completed many interviews; others had smaller networks and did not feel comfortable to approach young people that they did not know. Some had little time to trace potential participants because of study, work or family commitments. We were able to recruit more peer interviewers without difficulty and felt that the larger number was not a problem because they reached a wide range of young people from different backgrounds with their varied networks. The use of peers also helped to raise awareness of the study in the community, and participants could complete the questionnaire at a time that suited them, not just within working hours (Holmes *et al*. 2002:1272).

Four of the interviewers have gone on to collect data for other projects.

Case story— Recruiting staff to the CRCAH

Jenny Brands, Research and Development Manager of the CRCAH, talks about advertising jobs and about the interview process.

We did a lot of work promoting the job advertisement through our own networks and through others that would reach out beyond our networks. We also put down an Aboriginal person as a contact for the position, along with the non-Aboriginal supervisor. The result was we got a fantastic range of applicants

We realised that the jobs we were advertising needed people who were very flexible, able to work with a whole lot of different stakeholders, particularly Aboriginal people, and able to network and facilitate things to happen. So as well as some basic criteria that covered those things, we also included behaviours and values, such as things like, 'a commitment to the CRCAH's vision of sustained improvements in Aboriginal health' and 'listening to others' opinions to work in partnership'.

We thought the jobs would be quite hard to fill, and while it wasn't essential we got Aboriginal staff, it was clearly highly desirable. So we did a lot of work promoting the job advertisement through our own networks and through others that would reach out beyond our networks. We also put down an Aboriginal person as a contact for the position, along with the non-Aboriginal supervisor. The result was we got a fantastic range of applicants.

Using a different interview process

Then rather than just using a standard interview process, where you ask a question about each selection criteria, we decided to use an approach that involved asking the person being interviewed to talk about an example of something they'd done which related to the type of work they would be doing in this job, and to talk us through what they'd done, how they'd overcome barriers, how they'd built relationships and so on. This worked so well! Instead of being anxious about anticipating the next curly question they were going to get, the interviewees were able to relax and talk about something they knew about very well. The selection panel asked questions to help flesh out any criteria that hadn't been covered.

This interview strategy worked so well that we have adopted it to use most of the time now. I would recommend it to anyone. And through all our various strategies around that recruitment process, we got a really first class group of new staff members.

Recruiting local researchers in remote communities

Local researchers are often acknowledged as a key to successful community-based research. Employment of local Indigenous researchers can be a condition of funding and ethics committee approval. The reasons behind these decisions are good ones, based on research ethics, cultural safety and capacity building. However, there are complex issues to consider in small rural and remote communities.

Recruiting community-based researchers in small communities needs careful attention for a range of reasons:

- The same people often get asked because of their experiences and skills working across cultures and systems—their track record.
- The people who are asked tend to be people with lots of other responsibilities, which can put a lot of pressure on a few people and can cause 'burn out'—this also means that inexperienced people may not get a chance to develop their research interests, their skills and employment.
- The community can get tired of the many requests from outside agencies—there is a risk that people think of outside researchers as 'another mob to deal with', which means there is the danger of being told 'what you want to hear' rather than getting deeply engaged in discussions and planning.
- Research projects need to be community driven as much as possible—a researcher needs to be able to work this way with relevant community research participants and decision makers.
- The community researcher needs to have respect and standing.
- An Indigenous knowledge tradition may mean that the community researcher needs to meet Indigenous knowledge/relationship criteria, as well as non-Indigenous selection criteria.
- There could be pressure to take the easiest path to get the research done, not the best path for selecting and building capacity of local researchers—flexibility and time are needed, and delays can cause funding and management problems.
- Administration and support arrangements need to be in place before the researcher starts work.

Recruiting tips

- When you first negotiate the research project with community representatives, talk together about:
  - » the position/s and what the community-based researchers will do
  - » the skills needed
  - » training (e.g. what you can offer, what local mentors might offer)
  - » community perspectives, concerns and priorities for selection
  - » concerns about the pressures that can be put on local researchers.
- When meetings are held to negotiate details of the project, you will be talking about the roles of different members of the research team. When you clarify what local researchers will be doing (e.g. guiding, interpreting, facilitating, collecting data, analysing data, presenting results), you have an opportunity to talk about selection processes.
- Allow plenty of lead-in time.
- Avoid a recruiting approach where research managers telephone their contacts and ask for local advice. For example, 'We're going to [location]. Can you recommend people to work with us?' This word-of-mouth approach can add to the pressures on a few key people.
- Make it your business to know what other projects are happening in the community and who is involved. Share information about who is working on each project. This can be done inside your organisation, and between the different services, programs and community groups.
- Focus on future researchers and capacity development.
- Think about ways to improve research benefit.
- Explore ways to get young people interested in research work (e.g. team presentations to local school students, setting up work experience).
- Structure the local team so a trainee researcher works beside an experienced community researcher.
- Support opportunities for future employment by documenting informal on-the-job learning. For example, write a reference that assesses a person's capacity (Rea & Young 2006:54).
- If you bring in a trainer, think about whether sessions/workshops can be open to other people.

Case story—An introduction to research processes

This story explains how a young person was introduced to research processes. He attended a session to observe and to help an older family member, whose skills are often in demand.

Good bilingual bicultural researchers are hard to come by, and often overworked. We are trying to work in a monitoring relationship within the Indigenous researcher community. For example, yesterday we had a workshop on problem gambling for the Northern Territory Community Benefit Fund. There were about twelve Indigenous consultants there. One of the older women brought her young son (about fifteen years old), who sat quietly and listened throughout. At the end, each of the consultants was invited to give their summing up to a camera interview (which we will transcribe and translate) and the young man gave his comments as well.

The mentee's job is really to help the older researcher (who is usually a close relation) and just to settle into the whole discourse of cross-cultural research methodologies, reporting, ethics and so on (Michael Christie, Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory).

Planning long-distance supervision, support and training

Many Indigenous health research projects are set up with a supervising researcher off-site, while less experienced researchers in communities share information about the research and collect data on-site. There are a few things to be aware of when you plan long-distance supervision, support and on-the-job training.

Community-based researchers can be under a lot of pressure when they are the face of the research project

- Not fully understanding the project and feeling underprepared in the research methods may be an extra burden for researchers who are worried about being blamed if anything goes wrong. Good orientation, induction and training are critical.
- Community-based researchers can be under a lot of pressure when they are the face of the research project. While collecting quality data, they also have to speak for the project, give accurate information, answer questions, sometimes defend or apologise for outside researchers, show confidence, make decisions and meet expectations from different directions. This takes specialised training with supported practice.
- It is not realistic for an inexperienced researcher to do complex work without day-to-day support and back up. The supervisor or research leader needs to spend a lot of time on-site (equal to at least one week per month), working side-by-side with the researcher.
- Contingency planning and flexibility are needed to manage personal events, community changes and crises. Many issues outside the project can impact on researchers, research participants and research sites.
- When you are a long way away, small misunderstandings, miscommunications or assumptions can easily grow into conflict. Good, regular communication is essential and needs to be scheduled. The supervisor also needs to be accessible and available to talk at other times.
- An experienced and skilled supervisor is needed. The supervisor needs to have some insight and understanding of the researcher's experiences.

Remember—capacity development cannot be half done. When you plan the project, be realistic about your ability to fully supervise, train and support emerging researchers from a long distance. Sometimes this means rethinking how the research project is structured and managed.

Case story—Being the local face of the research

Nea Harrison and Carol Watson, Project Evaluators at the CRCAH, discuss how being the local face of the research may have risks.

The Indigenous researchers who were employed to conduct interviews as part of a wider research project raised the issue that their personal credibility is at risk if anything goes wrong in the research or the reports produced. They are the people known to the community and they will be the ones held responsible. The researchers reported that they are vulnerable because, although they only had responsibility for one aspect of the research or planning process, they would be held accountable by the community for all of it if there are any problems.

Sanchia Shibasaki, PhD graduate, Australian National University, confirms the risk.

If something goes wrong people won't blame the outside researchers, they won't remember them. For example, if I was involved in some research that was being done in my home community or communities that know my family and something went wrong, people will say, 'It was that Shibasaki girl, she did that research'.

Resources for job planning and preparation

For more advice about job design and recruitment of Indigenous researchers:

- Check with your human resources department about what support is available in your organisation or university—does it have an Indigenous Liaison Officer or guidelines?
- Talk to other research supervisors who have relevant experience.
- Use your professional networks to identify organisations with a good track record in employing Indigenous researchers or managing Indigenous research—ask for advice and investigate what guidelines are available. Possible sources include:
  - » Indigenous research institutions and organisations (e.g. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, CRCAH)
  - » Indigenous support units and Indigenous research centres within universities (e.g. Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit at The University of Melbourne, James Cook University Indigenous Health Unit, Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Kulunga Research Network at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Western Australia, Flinders Aboriginal Health Research Unit in South Australia, Menzies School of Health Research in the Northern Territory)
  - » peak Indigenous bodies involved in health research (e.g. state affiliates of National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO), Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses)
  - » Indigenous community-controlled health services (you can find these through NACCHO state affiliates)
  - » other Indigenous organisations involved in research (e.g. Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, Maya Living Free Healing Centre).
- Check the Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*, which lists many of these organisations and provides links to other sites related to Indigenous health, research and education: **<www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au>**.
- See 'information for employers' on the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission website, which has best practice guidelines for employers, including recruitment and selection guidelines: **<http://www.hreoc.gov.au>**.

chapter 5:
introducing the new researcher to the workplace

Indigenous researchers come into research jobs from a range of education and employment backgrounds. A person bringing a long work history and specialised Indigenous knowledge and skills may have limited experience working in academic and other mainstream research environments

In most organisations and institutions, human resources staff deliver a general orientation and induction program for new workers. These programs are often thorough and expertly delivered. However, even when this is the case, a newly employed researcher needs induction into the research project and the research team.

Often workplace orientation and induction programs are not well tailored for Indigenous people. As emphasised in early chapters, Indigenous researchers come into research jobs from a range of education and employment backgrounds. A person bringing a long work history and specialised Indigenous knowledge and skills may have limited experience working in academic and other mainstream research environments. Careful planning of orientation and induction activities is needed to ensure the new Indigenous researcher feels comfortable in the workplace and informed about the organisation and the research work.

Orientation in any work setting gives new workers a general introduction to employment within the organisation, its purpose and structure, key policies, procedures and what is expected. It should include a procedures manual of essential guidelines and forms.

When you are planning orientation activities for Indigenous researchers, think about the unwritten rules that govern workplaces in mainstream Australia. There are expectations about what work 'looks like' and what is judged to be a professional approach to work, even in workplaces that are flexible about staff working arrangements. It can be useful to talk about these rules and assumptions with new researchers. It can also be useful for other workers to reflect on how much they are influenced by a traditional picture of 'work'.

Induction usually provides more detailed information about the particular research job, the workplace culture, the research project and the team. You introduce the researcher to others and explain people's roles (e.g. in the team, organisation, community). It is also an opportunity to:

- explain the work, and to answer and ask questions—check what is understood and what is assumed
- talk about what to expect with supervision, training and support
- help the new researcher feel comfortable and welcome in the work environment
- establish a relationship in which the new researcher feels comfortable to ask questions about the workplace and the research project.

For Indigenous researchers who are new to research, it is important to have induction into the unwritten culture of the research community. Research institutions have their own culture, based around the role and status of people with different levels of academic qualifications. Ownership of knowledge and competition for research grants can influence how people work together. Not 'reading' the workplace culture, not understanding how it works or not feeling part of it can alienate new researchers. This feeling can be stronger when there are intercultural issues, as well.

I always thought that people shared research knowledge because this is the way to solve problems, but I found out that in research this is not always so. Some people guard their knowledge. It took me a long time to understand this (Indigenous Staff Member, CRCAH).

For Indigenous researchers who are new to research, it is important to have induction into the unwritten culture of the research community

Orientation is an opportunity for you to reinforce the fact that while an Indigenous researcher's knowledge may not, in some cases, be as formalised as others in the team, it is essential to the success of the research and is highly valued.

When a research team starts working together, you have the benefit of doing team induction. Training in groups is cost effective, but it has other benefits, too. These benefits include getting to know each other, setting up communication and information sharing between team members, and observing and respecting different ways of working.

An orientation and induction kit

It is unlikely you will need to put together an orientation kit. Many larger research workplaces, particularly universities, have extensive orientation information available to new employees, including regularly updated online information and training courses on a variety of orientation topics. Small organisations also have orientation packages.

Orientation kit essentials

An orientation kit should include:

- job description
- introduction to the agency
- employment conditions and policies
- workplace code of conduct and workplace values
- workplace policies and guidelines
- copies of forms, documents to go with guides (e.g. leave form, travel log)
- health and safety information (e.g. emergency procedures and numbers, employee assistance program, incident reporting)
- regulations (e.g. personal use of Internet, use of work vehicles)
- professional associations with which the workplace is aligned.

When working through orientation information with the new researcher, take care to explain policies and guidelines, and how the rules are applied. Check that the new worker understands the consequences of not working within policies or regulations, as appropriate.

Take the new researcher through use of information technology systems (e.g. telephone system, email, Internet access) and in-house communication (e.g. staff tray or message system).

Check that essential commencement procedures are done. For example, a confidentiality agreement signed, relevant immunisations given, an identification card issued, an application made for an Aboriginal land permit, driver's license checked.

Check that the pay system is in place and taxation forms are completed when the person starts in the job. This is important because payroll systems can be inflexible about things like only paying into bank accounts, and sorting out such administrative barriers can take time.

Induction kit essentials

As supervisor or research project leader, you will need an induction kit for new researchers on the project team. It might need to include:

- introduction to the research project and the project team
- lists of contacts (names, roles and contact numbers for workplace colleagues, important community contacts)—in mainstream organisations a list of Indigenous staff and/or external Indigenous contacts can help set up networks
- maps and community guides, if the researcher is not from the community (e.g. community organisations, cultural information, language guide, visiting protocols)
- background to the research project and key research in the area of work
- planning tools and documents
- research ethics and values, guidelines and protocols (e.g. *Keeping Research on Track: A Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about Health Research Ethics* (NHMRC 2005), *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (NHMRC 2003), local ethics guidelines, local Aboriginal research engagement protocols, informed consent guidelines, intellectual property guidelines)
- guide to research language
- information about the organisation's relationships within the community (e.g. relevant partnerships and agreements (memorandums of understanding), community patrons, etc.)
- practical tips for fieldwork (e.g. 4-wheel drive use, bush travel, radios, protective clothing).

With orientation and induction, take care to present the information in a way that suits the researcher's background. Take time to go through the material together and answer questions. Check for understanding.

Guide to planning an induction program

The program needs to cover the induction essentials in a way that matches the researcher's background and needs, and suits the research environment.

These questions may help to plan program content:

1. Who is the new researcher? (e.g. personal, cultural, professional background)
2. What does he or she need to know about the research work?
3. What skills and experience in this type of research or workplace does this person have? (e.g. completed study, done research work, worked in another part of the organisation, lives in the research community… What is our starting point?)

When you have decided 'what' content to include, ask:

1. How will it be best learned by this researcher? (training method)
2. Who is best to offer each part of the content? (Which staff member or community member/s? Who is best to explain these processes/ forms? Who knows the environment best?)

Design and deliver the induction program around the 'what', 'how' and 'who' questions

Decide on learning topics to cover the content. Some topics will focus on that person's research role, taking into account the skills and knowledge you know the person has (or does not have). Some topics are the same for all staff (e.g. policy procedures, safe work practices, emergency procedures, etc.).

Plan your own sessions or activities.

This is the critical time to do a skills audit. Don't put it off. (See Chapter 7, 'Training and Professional Development', **p. 125**.)

Initial work planning and goal setting sessions are part of the induction process. (See Chapter 6, 'Work Planning, Goal Setting and Performance Appraisal', **p. 107**.)

Get other people involved in planning their part of the induction program. Find out what is covered in their sessions (e.g. community supervisors taking an 'outside' researcher to community events, or out with family).

Make a schedule and distribute copies as needed. Remember:

- that sessions can be spread out, depending on things like work site/s and when other people are available
- that times can be flexible to allow for busy staff and unexpected events
- to ask the new researcher and trainers to sign off the schedule when a session is completed.

Evaluate and follow-up

Get feedback about the induction program from the new researcher and from trainers.

Ask questions and observe learning.

Some sessions may need to be repeated. This is to be expected. Reinforce the message that asking for a repeat session shows good self-assessment and initiative, not slow learning.

It takes a while for any new workers to know what they don't know, especially when overloaded with new information. To follow-up and to monitor the success of the induction program:

- have a follow-up session a few weeks after the induction program has finished
- use the induction kit and procedures manual to guide the 'agenda'
- ask the new researcher to prepare for the meeting by noting things to ask about.

Postgraduate researcher, Simone Reynolds (right) demonstrating laboratory techniques to cadet student Lisa Whop (left), with Janelle Stirling, (then) Coordinator of the Indigenous Health Research Program at Queensland Institute of Medical Research

Induction time is time well spent

For a research supervisor, extra time spent planning and preparing for staff induction, and delivering induction training, is time well spent. When combined with ongoing training, it is a good investment in terms of staff retention and project continuity. It is easier to do it properly from the start than to try to fix it later.

When I first came over here I had a little orientation but it was very quick, it was the basics, kitchen, toilet, admin… So I never really got a proper orientation around the building and it would have been nicer to go into each area and meet people and get a picture of what you're doing here… I really didn't know what was in a lot of [the offices] and I didn't want to just barge in on anything. Being new, I suppose, and a bit shy… it takes a while before I get to know and feel comfortable with people. I probably could have done better if I had that (Indigenous Researcher, Northern Territory).

For a new researcher, good induction is essential. It can be the key to truly understanding the research project, the research job and the research environment. It can be the key to feeling comfortable with other people and feeling adequately prepared to start the job. The time spent on informal induction in the research community is important for building the relationships needed for collaborative research and 'real' data.

Remember that even with good support processes it takes time for a new worker to adjust and feel confident. Taking on a new job, in a new workplace, with new people can be overwhelming for anyone. This feeling can be more intense when there are intercultural factors to manage and training requirements.

It was my first experience in an adult workplace environment and first experience studying. You are working five days a week, eight-hour days, which is a lot of work, and I was trying to learn a lot at the same time, so the first few months were pretty tough. That's probably when people think about leaving.

When I first started working in the labs here, a lot of the terminology used I didn't understand. Initially you get overwhelmed with all these terms and it can be quite hard to concentrate. I used to get home and go to sleep after work. I wasn't physically tired, just mentally! Just a head full of stuff… (Mark Mayo, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

Good induction can be the key to truly understanding the research project, the research job and the research environment

Finally, allow plenty of time for new researchers to get to know the workplace before they go to events and speak for the project, or before they take responsibility for main research tasks.

Case story—Orientation and induction of new workers on a project

Robyn Williams, Quality Improvement Training Officer for the Audit and Best Practice in Chronic Diseases (ABCD) project, explains the orientation and induction process for new workers on the project.

The ABCD project is a quality improvement project in Indigenous primary health care settings. An action-research approach is used to work with health centre staff and identifies strengths and weaknesses in their systems, sets goals for improvement, develops strategies to achieve these goals, and assesses the effectiveness of these strategies in improving chronic illness care.

People often forget that others are new and need to be guided to the point where they feel comfortable with the processes

In this project the community-based Indigenous researchers receive orientation to the project as soon as possible after starting (as do all staff). Project staff from the Menzies School of Health Research go to the new person's workplace/area to carry out induction and orientation on-site. Then workers are brought to Darwin for orientation and introduction to Menzies as a research institution and to the policy, administration and operational side of things.

Induction also needs to include early and ongoing discussion about the new person's professional development. In the ABCD project, this has always been an integral part of discussion. Staff are encouraged to take on or continue appropriate course(s) of study and to avail themselves of other opportunities including writing/co-authoring papers and presenting at conferences. Support is negotiated and certainly given wherever possible and practical.

The concept of working cross-culturally and being culturally safe is also at the forefront of all ABCD project activities and approaches, and forms part of the professional development of staff.

Thinking about my experience in a number of different places over the years, people immersed in a research environment often forget that others are new and need to be guided to the point where they feel comfortable with the processes and specific requirements. Early induction also lessens the chance of new researchers feeling overwhelmed and lost, as they have a better chance of knowing what questions to ask and what signposts to look for.

Case story—Orientation and induction from a supervisor's perspective

I'd been a supervisor for uni students in the past and also I'd been a manager where orientation was really important. Because people were feeling really anxious and not knowing what's happening, at least they could focus on the orientation; it's something written down. So I had all that set up and basically the roster was introducing the trainee to key people that we anticipated the trainee would need to have contact with.

For the first couple of months the trainee was pretty much my shadow and I think that really makes a difference for trainees, that they've actually got someone because it's that first couple of months where people can get lost—they can just feel really unsupported and I think particularly for someone coming from a different cultural background and the expectations of that role… they really needed to have the support (Mental Health Mentor and Supervisor, New South Wales).

Case story—Orientation and induction from a trainee's perspective

Basically I had a supervisor as soon as I walked on board and was told I had a job and that person actually took me to certain places around the metro area and showed me… where I would be working and gave me a quick over brief each day on different areas, which I thought was very good (Aboriginal Mental Health Worker trainee, New South Wales).

Workplace checklist

The following workplace checklist is a summary of the resources and processes required, to give a new researcher adequate supervision and support. The checklist looks beyond orientation and induction to include ongoing supervision, support and resource needs, and can be used:

- to determine whether the workplace has the resources to adequately support a researcher with limited research training and experience, or whether an established researcher should be employed
- to identify resource needs and to clarify the roles of work colleagues, when preparing to employ an emerging researcher
- to check that adequate support and resources have been provided, when the emerging researcher is employed.

Cultural safety is an important consideration in all activities.

If your organisation is unable to meet the general needs listed, think carefully about whether you are ready to take on an emerging Indigenous researcher.

Workplace Checklist

Is your workplace able to offer an emerging Indigenous researcher the orientation and induction, supervision, support and on-the-job training needed?

Recruitment and induction

You are clear about the Indigenous researcher's role. You want to take on a new researcher. You can give the researcher:

- ☐ Face-to-face induction to talk about the organisation, the policies and how things work; reporting expectations; the research project and team introductions; research culture; community relationships, protocols and expectations; values and ethics requirements; practical tips needed for fieldwork, etc.

Orientation and induction kits with:

- ☐ a job description; introduction to the project, the agency, the project team; employment conditions and policies
- ☐ lists of contacts, maps and community guides as needed
- ☐ background to the project and key research findings in the area of work
- ☐ planning tools and documents
- ☐ ethics guidelines, research protocols and other relevant guidelines
- ☐ a guide to research language.

Procedures manual with:

- ☐ step-by-step work guides and/or help to locate this information on a computer
- ☐ forms (confidentiality agreement, leave forms, travel log, etc.).

Access to any necessary orientation and induction training

- ☐ safe work practices, cross-cultural training, research skills, etc.

Skills audit to assess individual training needs

- ☐ one-on-one process

Supervision

There is someone to:

- ❑ give operational or line management
- ❑ offer expert advice about research or help set up contact with experienced researchers
- ❑ give information and advice about research ethics and code of conduct
- ❑ help link the researcher up with the community
- ❑ meet regularly to talk about progress, concerns, etc.
- ❑ review and assess the researcher's development
- ❑ help to review the researcher's work targets.

Learning support

Time is allocated for the researcher to complete training and professional development. There is someone who can:

- ❑ understand and help identify learning needs (by doing a skills audit)
- ❑ give practical support to help meet those learning needs, or arrange how to meet them
- ❑ observe the emerging researcher, participate in research practice (e.g. mentor)
- ❑ talk confidentially to debrief, deal with and resolve problems to do with the research
- ❑ help the researcher reflect on what is going on and ask questions
- ❑ be a role model—be willing and have the time to share skills
- ❑ advise on training choices and skill-building sessions
- ❑ advise on writing for different purposes as needed (e.g. proposals, research findings, reports, articles).

Facilities, equipment and resources

The emerging researcher is provided with:

- ❑ a quiet place to think and work
- ❑ a desk and chair
- ❑ telephone access and access to a secure, private area for telephone interviews and confidentiality
- ❑ computer access, the right software and instruction in relevant computer applications
- ❑ photocopier access
- ❑ library access as needed
- ❑ lockable cupboards to secure documents and records
- ❑ other equipment needed for the research (e.g. audio equipment, clinical equipment)
- ❑ a way of getting out to do fieldwork (e.g. access to vehicle, flights)
- ❑ funding to meet travel costs and consumable needs
- ❑ bathroom and tearoom facilities.

Time and commitment

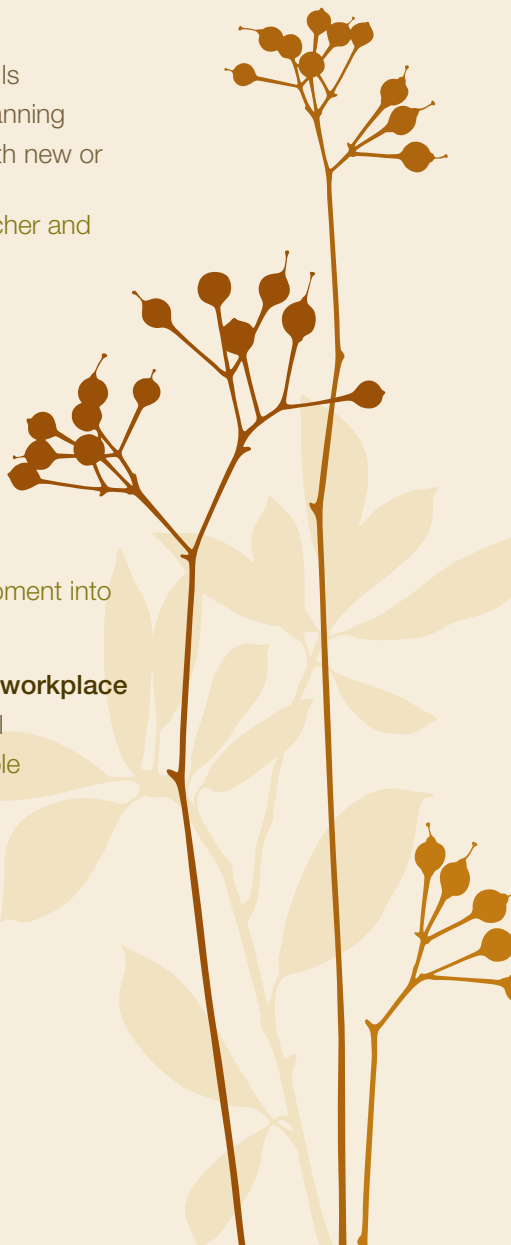
The research supervisor is able to:

- ❑ give at least one-quarter of work time to the supervision and support role
- ❑ work side-by-side and on-site as required.

The support, training and development of the emerging Indigenous researcher is as important as the supervising researcher's data collection or publication needs.

Note: The Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations' *2004 Statement of Minimum Resources for Postgraduate Study* sets minimum standards of facilities and resources as applied to research postgraduate students (see Chapter 3, 'Academic Supervision', **p. 41**).

chapter 6:
work planning, goal setting and performance appraisal



Work planning and goal setting with emerging researchers

It is vital that work planning, goal setting and performance appraisal processes in the research workplace are applied in ways that incorporate an Indigenous framework (that is, Indigenous ways of working and relevant issues) and take into account issues that are specifically relevant to emerging Indigenous researchers. The examples and case stories used in this chapter show how this can be done.

Collaborative planning is an important part of the supervision role and aims to:

- make sense of where the researcher fits into the big picture
- specify clear goals and milestones
- make clear what the emerging Indigenous researcher will be doing
- merge work with training and professional development
- incorporate an Indigenous framework into all aspects.

Your work planning and goal setting skills

Many research supervisors are highly skilled at project planning. Planning work and setting goals with team members involves more than straightforward planning skills, however, because it is essentially a communication and facilitation process, centred on each person and done in a way that meets the five needs listed above.

You might need to undertake some professional development in mentoring or coaching to do this well and build it into your ongoing supervision practice (see Chapter 7, 'Training and Professional Development', **p. 125**).

Individual work planning within team planning

The roles of all people in the research team are interrelated. Individual work planning always needs to take this into account. Members of the team need to know when they have a role in developing the emerging researcher and how to give that help. This can influence their individual work plans.

Reporting on progress and setting tasks at regular team meetings is a simple way of sharing work information and planning as a team. It enables people to avoid duplication of effort and it helps team members to know when and how they can best help each other.

What's different when planning work with new or emerging researchers?

New researchers usually need more guidance with work planning and goal setting, and more one-on-one supervision and support time, compared with experienced team members. Early in the project or employment, you are likely to need to plan at a more detailed level and to build in professional development opportunities.

Planning sessions need to:

- take into account the researcher's level of confidence and experience with workplace planning processes, as well as with research processes
- be based on a communication style the researcher feels comfortable with
- when possible, be linked to study the researcher is doing
- look at ways of building informal learning experiences into work tasks.

You might need to allow more time to reflect together on how work is going. It can be difficult for inexperienced workers to be sure where they are up to in their work plans, or to know how far they are from achieving goals. This is to be expected.

New researchers usually need more guidance with work planning and goal setting, and more one-on-one supervision and support time, compared with experienced team members

Ricky Mentha
Photo: Michael Howard

Case story—An emerging researcher and work planning

Ricky Mentha is an Indigenous Research Fellow at the Baker IDI (Heart and Diabetes Institute) based in Alice Springs. He has worked as an Aboriginal Health Worker, community development officer and an academic researcher. His current focus is on chronic disease management and prevention, particularly cardiology.

During my time as a trainee researcher at the Centre for Remote Health, John Wakerman was my primary supervisor. He gave me great support and spent a lot of one-on-one time with me. Weekly supervisor meetings helped to plan work and identify and target areas of developing professional capacity and research terminology and meaning. He pushed me to explore and retain research knowledge then use it to teach by facilitating research workshops in partnership with more experienced non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers.

The opportunity to network with non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers was also beneficial; this was achieved by attending and presenting at primary health care research conferences and other forums. Support for attending quantitative and qualitative research courses was also vital in my professional development.

John Wakerman
Photo: National Rural Health Alliance

John Wakerman is Professor and Inaugural Director of the Centre for Remote Health, a joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University, in Alice Springs. He is a Public Health Medicine specialist and general practitioner, with extensive experience in remote primary health care services as a medical practitioner, senior manager, researcher and advocate.

When Ricky started as a research trainee, we were starting a 'sensible drinking' research project with Australian Football League (AFL) Central Australia. We were able to link his on-the-job training plan with the research project plan and cover a range of research topics, from research design through to fieldwork and analysis. He also attended research training workshops in Port Augusta, offered by the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia.

Ricky and I had regular planning meetings when we would talk about how things were going with the project and what was happening. Having regular meetings is very important. Being available at other times is important, too, so you can respond quickly to questions and issues. Ricky brought his expertise and long experience with [Central Australian] footy to the planning and research. I incorporated training as we went—for example, looking at data sets; explaining why we designed the project as we did; what were the 'confounders' in the data and how to deal with them; how to tell if there was a causative relationship between the variables we were measuring. I would talk about the theory of what we were doing as we went along and link it to the research processes. I always tried to stretch Ricky and push him to new learning and it worked well for us. Being enrolled in the Master of Remote Health Management program helped him to develop skills to write up the results, develop a poster to present the findings, present the findings at conferences and submit a paper for peer review.

I really enjoyed working with Ricky. I learned a lot from him about the AFL world and the best way of working with the people involved in the research. Without Ricky's contacts, insider knowledge and communication skills, the project would have been a lot more difficult. And he has been able to follow up with his contacts and ensure that the AFL picked up the findings.

Things that impact on work plans

When research is being done in community settings, events and other factors can impact on researchers' work plans. They may include:

- traumatic events, which can affect many people in a closely connected community for a long time
- funerals
- other ceremonies
- community-level meetings and other events happening at the same time
- research participants moving between town and country, or between communities
- people being unavailable or away from the research setting when you plan to collect data or give feedback about findings (e.g. rural and remote residents routinely travel a long way for services)
- weather (e.g. wet season rains close roads and airstrips in northern Australia)
- complex networks in some areas (e.g. large urban centres)
- community governance issues.

Events and responsibilities in the emerging researcher's life can also impact on work plans.

Individual work plans need to be flexible to respond to what is happening in the Indigenous health research environment

Bart Currie (left) and Mark Mayo

Case story—Working in an Indigenous framework

Mark Mayo is a researcher in the Tropical and Emerging Infectious Diseases Division at Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin. His supervisor, **Bart Currie** is an Infectious Diseases Physician at Royal Darwin Hospital and Professor of Medicine at the Northern Territory Clinical School, Flinders University. He is also Head of the Tropical and Emerging Infectious Diseases Division of the Menzies School of Health Research.

Mark talks about Bart's supervision approach and organisation policy.

Bart is extremely sensitive to cultural needs and understands that sometimes in life there can be a bit more weight on your shoulders for various reasons, family, deaths, cultural reasons. Bart still pushes me to get things done but if they are not done straight away, he's not bringing you in and having a sit down saying, 'This is not good enough, the timeline is here, this is where we are at, we should be…' He's always asked, 'What's the problem. Is there anything wrong with that and can we get to it?'

Anything that is Indigenous [business], I can just go see Bart and as long as I'm saying why I'm doing it, and when I'll be away, then that's fine… so if there is a march on (NAIDOC week) or other Indigenous events, I can go along to them. And it doesn't always have to come off your leave, because some of these cultural events are important to Menzies and there is an awareness from Menzies that we are not just Indigenous people in our workplace, we are also Indigenous out there in the community.

Supporting him to be a valuable colleague [and support] for other Indigenous staff… just makes sense. It's how it should be

Bart talks about supporting Mark's role as an Indigenous researcher.

None of Mark's research work is Indigenous specific, [but] there are great benefits to the project that Mark is Indigenous, and therefore brings that to the project and to Menzies. There's been a different structure over time with the Indigenous group at Menzies… and Mark would be a central and constant part of the getting together of the Indigenous staff. There was a time when there were far fewer Indigenous staff here, and I think for some of them it was pretty tough, the research culture and everything else. I think Mark was probably an incredibly valuable colleague for other Indigenous staff over that time. Supporting [him to do that] just sort of makes sense, it's just the way it works and how it should be.

Choose a work planning approach that works for you

How you do work planning and how often you do it is not critical, as long as it works well for your research partnership and complies with protocols in your workplace. Whatever your approach, the collaborative process of work planning is guided by:

- aims of the research project
- the research project plan
- the emerging researcher's role in the project and the team
- the researcher's work goals and learning goals.

Many experienced supervisors are able to facilitate work planning in an unstructured way and still keep on top of emerging researchers' development needs and progress. Others like to draw up a formal work plan that maps out main tasks and agreed activities for a given period of time. A formal plan is likely to include:

- dates covered by the work plan, including next review date
- summary of main tasks
- details of what will be done, how and when it will be done, and what support is needed
- space to write outcomes or comments.

Having a formalised work plan makes regular review and reporting straightforward. It helps to track the project.

Circulating work plans within the research team can be a simple way of sharing work information.

Work planning is guided by the aims of the research project, the research project plan, and the emerging researcher's role, work goals and learning goals

Case story—Example of a work planning approach

Carolyn Thompson, a researcher at Menzies School of Health Research in the Northern Territory, talks about the work planning approach at her workplace. Carolyn's supervisor is **Tricia Nagel**.

We do a whole team work plan and it looks at all the projects and even looks at individual tasks. We meet once a week, where we bring it all out and we usually walk out with more tasks from the meeting. Whatever the task is, it'll go down on [the supervisor's] list.

And then from there you have your own tasks and then [our supervisor] meets with us. With me, it's every Monday at 9.00 am to see how I'm going with each task. She'll sort of mark off where I'm at with it, if I've completed it; if I've done it within a deadline date or not. And that's more or less how we go along with our planning, tasks, projects or whatever your task is within the project.

Sometimes… I get a little frustrated because a priority jumps at you and that's where [the tasks] build up, because you're dealing with a lot of the 'here and now'. And it gets hard to try and catch up on things. But [my supervisor] is the sort of person, if I feel like I can't cope with it all, I can go up and say, 'Tricia, I just can't do this, I can't see myself having this done by the time you want it.' So I just try and make myself let her know early enough and then she'll either take it off me or find someone else to do it. She is a good supervisor… very supportive.

Emerging researchers in this team link the work plans with their own broader project plans:

We do up our own project outline—what you do, what could happen and things like that, just for ourselves to know the description of our project, what we've got to be doing, how we're going to be doing it. It was good practice for me to keep up that project proposal sort of format, which I learned at uni.

About goal setting

Each researcher and research team has learning and work goals. Researchers work with different types of goals in a research workplace or project. For example, goals can include:

- project deadlines and outcomes
- standards for best research practice
- guidelines for best work practice, e.g. clinical guidelines, health and safety guidelines, community engagement protocols.

This can be confusing for new researchers. Be clear about what type of goal you are talking about and how it influences the researcher or the research team.

Tips for setting individual work goals are to:

- make goals realistic (e.g. how many field trips or interviews are possible in that time? Is training available in that time?)
- be specific—aim for things that can be seen or measured, then be clear about what standard/quantity/change will show that the goal has been met
- set a timeframe for achieving or reviewing the goal
- break long-term, complex goals into short-term steps and goals
- talk through the how—what actually needs to be done, what resources you need, who does what?
- talk through the what if—possible problems that might stop the emerging researcher achieve the goal, how to avoid them and what you might do if they occur
- get expert knowledge when you need it—who else has done this?
- let experienced team members know how they can support the emerging researcher's goals.

smart
is a useful checklist for goal setting. Goals need to be:

specific
measurable
achievable
realistic
time-framed

Case story—Building skill development into work planning and setting goals

In the following case story, **Mark Mayo** talks about how his work as a researcher has been planned and supported in a way that focuses on skill development.

About starting work in the laboratory at Menzies School of Health Research

I was assigned to lab assistant when I first started in the labs. My work involved general duties, so when I came to work, even though I was still getting familiar with the workplace, there were tasks I could do and things I could complete myself. So I guess [I had] some sense of self-accomplishment in the workplace, and that's how I slowly moved through the labs and gained confidence.

About building skill development into work

I was trained in the basics of the lab and then moved through and started working on projects one day a week. I was not rushed in and told, 'This is what you're doing, this is what you are going to be doing'. I was not dictated to, I was allowed to work at my pace as long as the work was being done. One day a week, I was given the opportunity in the labs to go around and talk to people, so if ever I saw anyone doing anything interesting, I could always just say, 'What are you doing and can I join in?' That's one of the things I found great at Menzies. I was able to just go up to people and ask if they would take time to show me things, or they'd make a time. They wouldn't say, 'Oh, we're too busy' or 'You'll learn this at some point' because you probably won't. It is a very big thing in the workplace, making sure that the workers are allowed to ask questions…

Discussions I have with my project supervisor professor, Bart Currie, usually involves him asking me, 'Is everything okay? How are things going?' This I believe gives him an indication of what is going on with me and what my focus is; he will then give me work in a particular direction. Like, he's started me off slow with, for example, learning about the budgets. He just used to get me to go and check the budgets and make sure we were on track, and then once I was good at informing him about that, he'd start saying, 'Can you tell me what the budgets are for projection for the next year?' So then I'd go talk to the finance staff and sit down and talk through things. I felt at ease doing this as I had been directed to by Bart.

This is now a part of my job and when we do our grant writing, I do the budgets for the grant. He doesn't have to worry about that part of the job. He just takes the budget stuff as I give it to him. He might query it but I can explain it to him.

About goal setting and planning

We have group meetings and in the meetings we follow an agenda. We ask what everyone's doing and we keep a record in the minutes and when you complete your task it's crossed off (this way we keep track of who is doing what and what work has been done). The agenda is an ongoing thing, continuously changing, and it gives individuals their tasks and goals for the next month.

The timeline may change but we do have set goals about what we're doing

About project timelines

We have timelines to get things done, but… you set a timeline to say you're going to get so many samples by this date or you are going to get so many people by this date but it doesn't necessarily end that way. You might not get as much as you want so your timeline may change. You may say you need to get more people or results—or what we thought we'd get, we need to change the project—but we do have set goals about what we're doing and tasks.

Some things have to be done to a timeline, but if there was a problem with it, Bart [Currie] would ask me and I'd say I can't get it done and he would look at other ways to get it done, or get someone else to help.

Performance appraisal in a research workplace

Most workplaces have performance appraisal guidelines in place—annual appraisals are common practice. The most common approach combines supervisor appraisal with self-appraisal, but other approaches can be used (e.g. research participant or community appraisal).

The aim of performance appraisal is to support the researcher. It is a tool for:

- giving feedback about work performance
- celebrating good work
- working out training and support needs
- self-knowledge, giving insights into strengths and weaknesses
- focusing on long-term goals and career development
- coming up with ideas about how to better support the researcher.

Talk with the emerging researcher about preparing for performance appraisal well ahead of schedule. An important part of the appraisal is finding out what helps or hinders the researcher's performance. This helps to make sure the appraisal is fair and realistic. You need this information to work out the best ways to support and improve performance.

Take the opportunity to do performance appraisal training even if appraisal is a small part of your workload. Training to improve skills in listening, giving feedback and coaching can be applied all the time.

An annual performance appraisal is adequate for emerging researchers, as long as a system of regular reviews is working. Resources needed for the performance appraisal process include performance appraisal guidelines for your workplace, the emerging researcher's job analysis or job description, the research project outline and other relevant material such as work plans, journals and reports.

Getting ready for performance appraisal

You can help the researcher to prepare for appraisal by providing a list of questions, such as the following, to think about.

- What skills and knowledge am I currently bringing to the research project or organisation?
- What are the things I have done best (since the last appraisal)?
- Are there things I feel I could do better? What got in my way?
- Have I read sufficient literature to be able to show knowledge about the research area?
- Are there things about the job that I would like to change, that would help me to do the research work?
- How could the organisation/service/project give me more support in my work?
- How could my supervisor help me do a better job?
- Does my job make the best use of my abilities? What would help me be more productive?
- What areas of my research practice would I like to get better at before the next appraisal? How could I get this training/experience?
- What do I expect to be doing two years from now?

The aim of performance appraisal is to support the researcher

Take the opportunity to do performance appraisal training even if appraisal is a small part of your workload. Training to improve skills in listening, giving feedback and coaching can be applied all the time

Performance appraisal—an example

The following example shows how the CRCAH conducts performance appraisal.

The CRCAH Agreement on Work Performance and Learning has four parts:

Part A—CRCAH Values
Part B—Work Plan
Part C—Learning Plan
Part D—Feedback and Comment

The CRCAH performance agreement is a twelve-month process, with formal feedback every three months and informal feedback on an ongoing basis.

Part A—The CRCAH Values

The CRCAH Values set out the behaviours staff see as being important to achieve the vision of the organisation by providing a culturally appropriate and professional service to our clients.

Managers and staff members should discuss and agree on how the Values are expected to be demonstrated in relation to the individual's work and what practical examples may be used for the Performance Assessment process.

Part B—The Work Plan

The Work Plan is developed to reflect the work responsibilities for a twelve-month period. Each three months the employee and their Supervisor review the Work Plan and update where necessary. The Work Plan will indicate how the employee will demonstrate successful achievement of their job responsibilities and allows for Self-Reflection.

Formal reviews of the Performance Agreement will be carried out every three months and have three components—

a. A discussion between the employee and the manager about the previous three months. The Self-Reflection section can be completed and should indicate how the employee feels they have met their responsibilities or identify any issues they had.

b. A discussion between the employee and manager to confirm any changes to the Performance Agreement.

c. A forward planning discussion to confirm the priorities for the coming three months.

Part C—The Learning Plan

The Learning Plan identifies what skills, knowledge or training the individual needs to achieve their key job responsibilities (corporate) and what the individual may need or want to achieve in the future (personal and career development). Areas where development is required in relation to the CRCAH Values should also be included on this form under personal development.

Part D—Feedback and Comments

The most important part of the Performance Agreement is a high quality discussion between the manager and the staff member. This underpins the Performance Agreement process and ensures both parties are in agreement about what is expected. It also provides an opportunity to celebrate success and achievements.

Formal and informal review

Review is a natural part of the supervision cycle of planning and goal setting, completing tasks, reflecting and reviewing, planning and so on.

Informal review happens in regular supervision meetings, when you look at how the work is going and talk about progress, achievements, problems and the best ways forward.

Some workplaces do a formal review every few months. Formal review may be part of the workplace's approach to performance appraisal, or a project requirement (e.g. to report progress to research stakeholders). The process of review is an opportunity to plan the next few months' work, evaluate how the emerging researcher is going, give feedback and encourage self-reflection. It identifies what support and advice are needed and is useful for planning training and development. Formal review outcomes should be documented.

Resources needed for review include:

- the research project outline
- relevant workplace policies (e.g. an organisation's values)
- the current work plan
- a template for the next work plan
- a journal/work diary, other relevant material.

chapter 7:
training and professional development

This chapter defines Indigenous research capacity building in terms of education, training and professional development, and raises some of the issues that affect decisions about training and professional development for emerging Indigenous researchers. It also looks at mentoring in Indigenous health research.

The chapter guides you through the practical processes of:

- a skills audit
- individual training and development planning.

It gives examples of how research training and professional development can be designed around research project and researcher needs. Some of the education and training options available to emerging Indigenous researchers are explained, as well as how to access them and how to provide on-the-job training support.

Building research capacity

The aim of capacity building in Indigenous health research is to have more Indigenous people involved at all levels of the research, more Indigenous ownership and control of the research, and a growing number of Indigenous researchers and research supervisors.

The CRCAH uses the term capacity development to refer to:

the process of building skills, knowledge and capability. Capacity development incorporates both formal and informal education and training, and other more flexible, experiential and often opportunistic models of development. It involves a… two-way process of learning… particularly in cross-cultural contexts (CRCAH 2006:3–4).

Many health research projects employ emerging Indigenous researchers who, despite their often extensive life and work experiences, might lack some of the competencies and experience needed to do their research jobs. Projects *need* to do this because they need the specialised skills and knowledge that Indigenous researchers bring and there are not enough qualified Indigenous researchers available, especially in remote communities. Projects *choose* to do this because Indigenous research capacity building is a priority.

We have moved away from the idea of the Indigenous researcher as the 'research assistant', collecting data for someone else to analyse and write up

We have moved away from the idea of the Indigenous researcher as the 'research assistant', collecting data for someone else to analyse and write up. Our approach is to treat the training program seriously and to customise on-the-job training for each new researcher because people bring different work and education backgrounds. And we exploit and learn from the skills and experience that each Indigenous researcher brings to every stage of the research process, from inception to knowledge transfer (John Wakerman, Director, Centre for Remote Health, Alice Springs).

Research projects should, particularly when they engage new Indigenous researchers, be viewed as learning projects in themselves. In other words, it is important to reflect on both the process activities in each project and also the professional development approaches required for the researchers within the project or research community (Dunbar *et al*. 2004:vii, xi).

A steady increase in the number of trained Indigenous researchers means that a growing number of health research projects employ people with experience in health research and/or with formal qualifications. Development priorities for these researchers are likely to involve postgraduate study, leadership or management training.

As a supervisor of new and emerging researchers, you have a vital role in research capacity building. Other chapters have shown how to support learning as part of a workplace supervision role. Chapter 6, in particular, uses stories to show how experienced research supervisors build learning into the day-to-day processes of planning and conducting research. These are good examples of capacity development through 'experiential' and 'opportunistic' learning. Whether formal or informal, training and professional development are an extension of the support provided to emerging Indigenous researchers through good practice supervision. They need to be built into the way health research projects are managed. They need to be planned for.

Careful planning is important because the range of skills needed by researchers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in Indigenous health is complex and diverse. At the same time, good capacity building can include basic strategies:

- **work and study can be linked**

> *The work supervisor needs to actively link work with study. We need to overlap work and study as much as possible, especially given other challenges that many people are dealing with all the time. Joining the course content with what is happening in the workplace embeds study in a totally practical research way, so that theory is translated into practice and learning is applied* (Tricia Nagel, supervisor).
>
> *I kept my project for uni within the work area. I found it easier having something from my work area that I was familiar with, that I knew I could run with because it was my passion to do this project [with the Tiwi Islands]. The whole time Tricia was very supportive. She helped at times if I was a bit stuck with the stuff from uni and I couldn't understand it. There [were] times where I actually got burned out from uni, travelling and [work and] everything… I then talked to Tricia, who supported me all the way and really was concerned about my wellbeing and ensuring I wasn't getting overloaded or burning myself out again* (Carolyn Thompson, Researcher, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

- **workplace policies can give formal support for study** by providing paid study leave

> *Menzies always supported me. If my exams were coming up, they would say I could take more time off but it would be paid. They wouldn't say, 'You have to take leave without pay', which was good for me… It helps* (Mark Mayo, Researcher, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

- **individual supervisors and workplaces can work within an Indigenous framework**

  Many of the support issues in Chapter 2, 'Workplace Supervision', **p. 13**, are relevant when emerging researchers are undertaking training courses and other professional development activities.

- **relevant 'train-the-trainer', cross-cultural and communication skills training**

  Knowing how to share knowledge is important for everyone on the research team.

  There is often a gap between knowing how to do things and being able to share that information in a way that makes it accessible to other people. This applies when experienced Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers share knowledge about health and research. It applies when Indigenous researchers share cultural knowledge.

  Don't assume that team members have teaching skills, or that Indigenous researchers have high-level intercultural communication skills. Training may be needed for people to take on these roles.

  If you haven't had experience as a trainer or facilitator, you might need to look at doing a suitable course (these can be as short as one or two days), or finding a mentor who can guide you in this area.

Issues that affect decisions about training and development

One of the things we emphasise is that training should, when possible, lead to formal qualifications

Recognition for training

Recognition of informal training is an issue for many Indigenous workers. It is common for people who have been employed in a variety of projects and jobs to have done many short courses and training workshops. A lot of this training is informal and the learning goes unrecognised.

In many cases there are no records of what has been learned. This is a problem for individuals because it means they have no evidence of learning—evidence that could save study time, money and repetition when enrolling in courses. Lack of records also means there is no database of who has particular skills and qualifications in the community or organisation. This is not good capacity building.

To help ensure good capacity building:

- make record keeping a priority when you organise and supervise training
- where suitable, use accredited training that will be recognised by education institutions and other employers.

> *One of the things we emphasise is that training should, when possible, lead to formal qualifications. We are not suggesting that researchers should be pushed into doing tertiary study (especially if they are not motivated or know that other commitments will make long-term study too difficult). However, accredited courses are available at the certificate and diploma levels. These courses can articulate into higher education courses, giving students recognition for prior learning and cutting back course completion time* (Mark Mayo, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

Formal study versus other pathways

Often formal study is the first thing people think of when they talk about professional development. This is the right option for many emerging Indigenous researchers, but not for all. When you talk about learning options, take into account the researcher's personal and family situation, what is happening in the person's life, and where he or she is at in terms of education background, career plans, life plans and events, and so on. Ask:

- is a formal course of study right for this person at the moment?
- does the person have the prerequisite education or training to enrol and succeed in the course?
- does the researcher have the support and resources to succeed?
- are support and resources likely to be available for the whole time it will take to complete the course?

The obstacles and stresses that can be involved in formal study can challenge even the most committed and resilient student.

> *My study has been hard. I lost time when a relative died and I went home for a funeral. I got behind in my assignments and missed the deadlines. I now have to re-do the whole thing and catch up. Exams are hard, too. I am a visual learner and find it hard to cram for tests* (research student, in CRCAH 2005:20).

Be careful not to let your own education background or workplace bias the advice you offer. If you push people into formal study without really understanding their lives, you will probably end up not understanding why they resist, or why they don't complete the course.

> *It is common for research projects to be conducted through partnerships involving universities and academic career researchers. It is important for academic researchers to understand that people who want to learn about research may not necessarily want to gain a formal qualification in research. Some people may want to undertake university study in research and should be supported to do so, but guard against over enthusiasm, as it is easy for people to feel pressured to pursue this path. Remember that mentoring for skills development may be the way that some people prefer to learn.*
>
> *Identify all the options for learning about research and listen carefully to what people say they need* (Kate Gooden, Supervisor, Maari Ma Aboriginal Health Corporation, New South Wales).

However, completing formal education has great and lasting benefits for many people. You also need to share these stories and possibilities.

Vanessa Harris

As an Aboriginal person, working in Aboriginal health for the past ten years, I remained committed and passionate about the issues effecting Aboriginal people, and I have and would try to advocate on behalf of the communities I worked with, but it always seemed that my advocating would turn into an emotional and emotive debate around being too involved and too personally involved—not being impartial to the problems and not focusing on the issues. It felt like I wasn't listened to, which was very frustrating.

It wasn't until I undertook a degree at Flinders University and within that academic environment I started to learn the art of articulation and the art of being unemotional and to look at issues objectively in order to advocate without seeming to be emotionally involved in the problems.

I started to understand that having an articulate, level-headed and well-grounded point of view was the way forward in advocating on behalf of Aboriginal health. I found I still maintain the passion and commitment to the issues and problems facing Aboriginal health but now people tend to listen (Vanessa Harris, Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program Manager, CRCAH).

Mentoring in Indigenous health research

Mentoring is recognised as a good capacity-building strategy. There is a need for more mentoring within the Indigenous health research workforce.

> *A recent national study asked people who worked in Indigenous health research about what may influence people's decisions to work in this field. 353 researchers completed questionnaires. When asked what would attract more researchers, one of the themes that came through was better support and mentoring. When asked what made Indigenous health research unattractive, 16 per cent identified lack of mentors, and 20 per cent identified professional isolation and lack of collaborators.*
>
> *Respondents cited a need for 'good mentoring by a researcher experienced in Aboriginal health and Aboriginal mentor who may not be a researcher…' and 'an Indigenous co-researcher who would be there to mentor an non-ATSI [sic] researcher about the best way for working with a community* (Rumbold *et al*. 2007:17).

Mentoring is traditionally thought of as a learning relationship in which the more experienced person (the mentor) is a guide, helper and role model to the less experienced person (the mentee). Mentoring relationships happen naturally, such as an Elder's role and a parent/aunty/uncle role. Mentoring offers knowledge sharing in a personalised way. It offers informal learning in the context of the real life and real work setting.

The person being mentored can get practical insights into the work setting and can learn from the work practices modelled by the mentor. He or she has opportunities to talk with an experienced mentor about successes, failures, worries and lessons learned.

The mentor can get new insights, too, as things are looked at through different eyes. There is a feeling of helping another person's development, and of indirectly supporting the people or community participating in the research. In summary, mentors take a direct role in research capacity building.

Most workplace mentoring relationships are two-way exchanges, especially in intercultural settings.

Diane Walker (left) with Nea Harrison

I chose Nea [Harrison] as my mentor because she has high-level skills in the areas where I want to develop. I didn't really think she was going to be learning from me. But when we sit and talk about how the mentoring process is working or not working, and what I am learning, she'll always say, 'Well, I have learned… from you'. It's always two-way (Diane Walker, Capacity Development Officer, CRCAH).

Choice of mentor is based on:

- priority areas of guidance and development for the mentee
- identifying a person with the right expertise who is able and willing to share that expertise
- the person being accessible to the mentee, and able to commit the time needed.

Common examples of mentoring in Indigenous health research include:

- a more-experienced researcher sharing research skills
- a cultural mentor or local community mentor guiding an outside researcher
- two-way sharing of knowledge and support for development (often an exchange of cultural skills and research skills)
- a person having more than one mentor to support different types of learning.

When we sit and talk about how the mentoring process is working or not working, and what I am learning, she'll always say, 'Well, I have learned… from you'. It's always two-way

Mentoring emerging Indigenous researchers

Mentoring can sit comfortably with Indigenous learning traditions in which knowledge is shared as a gift (not a right), knowledge sharing is orally based and reciprocity exists.

For emerging Indigenous researchers, a mentoring relationship may involve:

- mentoring by experienced researchers in research skills and techniques
- mentoring by Indigenous or non-Indigenous colleagues to understand and deal with structural and administrative processes, funding bodies and so on
- different mentors for learning different skills
- the emerging Indigenous researcher in the role of 'cultural mentor' for non-Indigenous members of the research team
- mentoring by Elders, especially in matters of researching and representing Indigenous knowledge
- a two-way learning partnership
- mentoring in the context of the workplace
- mentoring in the context of academic study
- mentoring in academic leadership and in becoming a research leader
- mentoring in supervision skills.

Mentoring non-Indigenous research supervisors

Research capacity building also involves developing the skills of non-Indigenous research supervisors to work effectively in Indigenous health research contexts.

For a non-Indigenous research supervisor, a mentoring relationship might involve:

- two-way exchange of knowledge and skills between the Indigenous researcher and supervisor
- mentoring by another research supervisor with skills and experience in intercultural supervision
- mentoring by a staff member in an Indigenous organisation
- cultural mentoring by an Indigenous community member.

Cultural mentoring

The NHMRC describes a cultural mentor as 'a community or organization member, funded by the research project, to make sure that researchers stay on the right path, and that the project remains within cultural bounds and remains safe for everyone involved' (NHMRC 2005:37). The cultural mentor could be a local researcher who works between the community and the outside researcher. He or she shares local cultural and research knowledge and joins in all stages of the research. This way, everyone benefits—the researcher learns about working with Indigenous people, the mentor develops more research skills, and the community gets the outcomes of the research, as well as 'practical understanding of the research journey' (NHMRC 2005:33).

The Australian Government publication *Keeping Research on Track: A Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about Health Research Ethics* can be downloaded from the NHMRC website: **<www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/>**.

Emerging researchers as cultural mentors

As identified in Chapter 2, 'Workplace Supervision', **p. 13**, emerging Indigenous researchers are often cultural mentors for their non-Indigenous research colleagues.

Many Indigenous workers are extremely skilled at this role, drawing on years of experience of successful intercultural communication. However, it would be a mistake to expect cultural mentors to always have the skills to communicate cultural knowledge to non-Indigenous colleagues in ways that their colleagues can understand and embrace. People have different ways of learning and often an academic way of learning doesn't match an Indigenous way of building up knowledge through relationships and time. This can be a problem within a research team, despite effort and goodwill from everybody. Sometimes it underpins the feeling many Indigenous researchers have of not being listened to. You need to be aware of these issues and feel comfortable to talk about them when necessary.

A cultural mentor can give really practical help in day-to-day research matters and understanding of community issues.

> *With community politics and other intercultural issues, having formal or informal Aboriginal mentors or guides… has been critical. So for me, at the more academic level, having Indigenous people as co-investigators who I can just phone anytime and say 'look, this has come up, what are your thoughts, and what do you think I should do'. Or, at the community level, having people whose opinions can be sought is so important!*
> (Mayo 2009:14).

Having Indigenous people as co-investigators who I can just phone anytime and say 'Look, this has come up, what are your thoughts, and what do you think I should do'. Or, at the community level, having people whose opinions can be sought is so important

A cultural mentor can help you understand the cultural differences in communication styles and explain people's attitudes, responses and actions.

> *My cultural mentor has really been invaluable in helping me come to terms with so many of the subtleties of my work. Should I go to the patients' funerals, why is this kid trying so hard to avoid work, why did everyone at the meeting say yes but no-one is doing anything about it? All this and more has become clearer after discussing with my cultural mentor who has an uncanny knack of being part of the community but being able to objectively view their actions to explain them to the Migaloo [whitefella]* (Baker 2006:11).

Cultural mentoring is about interpersonal relationships, so it is about more than work skills. There is an emotional aspect. It can involve pain, anger or frustration when something goes wrong. It can involve a great feeling of inclusion and warmth when things work well. And there can be a sense of loss when a mentoring relationship ends. You each need to be prepared for these feelings.

What makes a mentoring relationship work?

The principles of mentoring are universal. Both people in the partnership need to put aside time and have regular contact. You need to respect and trust each other. You need to be able to talk honestly and confidentially, give feedback, talk through experiences and solve problems together. A mentor needs to share networks and knowledge, give advice and challenge the mentee's ideas.

Rick Hayes (left) and Jack Bulman

Case story—Development of a mentoring relationship

Rick Hayes and Jack Bulman wrote this story about how their mentoring relationship grew and how it works for them both.

Jack is the manager of the Mibbinbah Indigenous Men's Health and Men's Sheds/Spaces Project for the CRCAH. Rick is a lecturer and course coordinator for the Bachelor of Health Sciences at La Trobe University in Melbourne. They are mentors for each other.

Rick Hayes:

Our relationship has evolved over the years.

At first there was a combination of student/teacher and collegial aspects.

Jack worked with Ngarn-gi Bagora Indigenous Centre here at the Bundoora campus of La Trobe and I was a lecturer and coordinator in the School of Public Health. So, we were colleagues in that sense. In another sense, we had the teacher/student relationship because Jack was a mature-aged student in our course. You cannot get away from or overlook that; but you can shape how that relationship works. For us, it was a joint effort to develop the Indigenous

Development and Action Project. Jack also helped me out of a tight spot when I was on the State organising committee of the National Men's Health Conference in Melbourne in 2005.

Already in our working partnership we have had some tough times, and this goes both ways, and the thing is that we are always available for each other

The trust generated in these relationships has grown as we work together as co-leaders on the Indigenous Men's Health Project for the CRCAH. I know things from a community worker point of view that Jack shares with me as a fellow community worker. I know some things about public health generally and men's health particularly that he is learning. And he knows many things about Indigenous people, men particularly, and Indigenous health that I am learning about. So, the relationship is about friendship, trust, mutual respect and camaraderie. Already in our working partnership we have had some tough times and this goes both ways and the thing is that we are always available for each other.

Jack Bulman:

Rick has been fantastic for me and for our work in Indigenous men's health, which we both have a great passion for. I know I have learned a great deal from Rick over the years and I know I have helped Rick with Indigenous matters. If we are talking about mentoring, then I feel that we both have mentored each other. We spend a lot of time on the phone discussing a range of issues, there is never a decision made by one without consulting the other. As Rick has said, the relationship is about friendship, trust and respect. We are like brothers. But sometimes it is frustrating. This is because I feel I am often still seen as Rick's student and so I am not given the respect that I have earned through my own work.

Mentoring tips for supervisors

If you have not been a mentor or mentee before, ask people who have been in these roles about how they made it work (or why it didn't work so well for them).

Take time to work out the type of learning activities emerging researchers want to be involved in, and to appraise and plan what is needed. Mentoring will be especially time consuming in the early stages.

Be realistic about how often you plan to get together and about the activities, goals and deadlines you set yourselves.

Work out what other tasks or commitments you can let go when you become a mentor. Lack of time is the most common reason why mentoring doesn't work out.

Have regular contact. Short conversations are better than none.

Talk about small miscommunications before they become big problems in the relationship or the research. Watch for miscommunications in intercultural mentoring. Different non-verbal signs, language and culture-based assumptions mean that you might not always be aware of miscommunication.

When mentoring is a structured part of training and development, it needs to be built into the research project plan. Management responsibility, time and resources need to be allocated, and there may need to be different mentors for different parts of the learning program.

> *it is important not to underestimate the time and effort required at the initial stage in order for you to make an honest appraisal of the amount/type of engagement you can expect and the capacity-building and training [a mentor] will need to provide.*
>
> *For example, [a research trainee] might nominate to be involved in conducting focus groups, but might not have had experience doing this. Ideally a person who is experienced in facilitating focus groups should be identified and engaged to mentor the less experienced person. This process requires both time and resources. Therefore, it is important in the planning phase of the research project to factor in adequate resources to engage suitable mentors, and adequate time for the mentee to practice new skills* (Kate Gooden, Supervisor, Maari Ma Aboriginal Health Corporation, New South Wales).

Skills of mentoring

Coaching

Coaching within the context of a mentoring relationship involves helping an individual to fill a particular knowledge gap by teaching the individual how to do things more effectively.

Counselling

Counselling involves the mentee in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating the learning.

Guide the mentee to set goals and provide feedback based on reflection.

Facilitating

A good facilitator is

- encouraging
- motivating
- inspiring.

The key to being a good facilitator is effective communication. This is achieved by:

- being authentic (believable)
- listening effectively
- checking for understanding
- articulating clearly and unambiguously
- picking up on non-verbal cues.

Networking

Networking means building and maintaining the right contacts. This network will enable you to connect mentees with other people who can be resources (adapted from RACP n.d.:3).

Mentoring resources and websites

The Primary Health Care Research and Information Service is a source of information about Australian primary health care practice, policy and research, and provides mentoring information: **<www.phcris.org.au/publications/index.php>**. The downloadable document *Fact Sheet: Mentoring Matters* (PHCRIS 2005) includes a bibliography of mentoring resources.

Some state and territory networks and university websites have programs that link health researchers with mentors and supervisors. For an example, see the NSW Primary Health Care Research Capacity Building Program: **<www.nswphc.unsw.edu.au/>**.

Formal mentoring programs have guidelines and resources that can help researchers. For example:

- The *Cultural Mentor Handbook* (Centre for General Practice and Rural Medicine 2002a) provides information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are acting as cultural mentors for general practitioners and medical students in North Queensland.
- *Suggested Guidelines for the Development of Indigenous Cultural Mentors* (Centre for General Practice and Rural Medicine 2002b) provides information about the role, selection process, qualifications, remuneration, training and support.

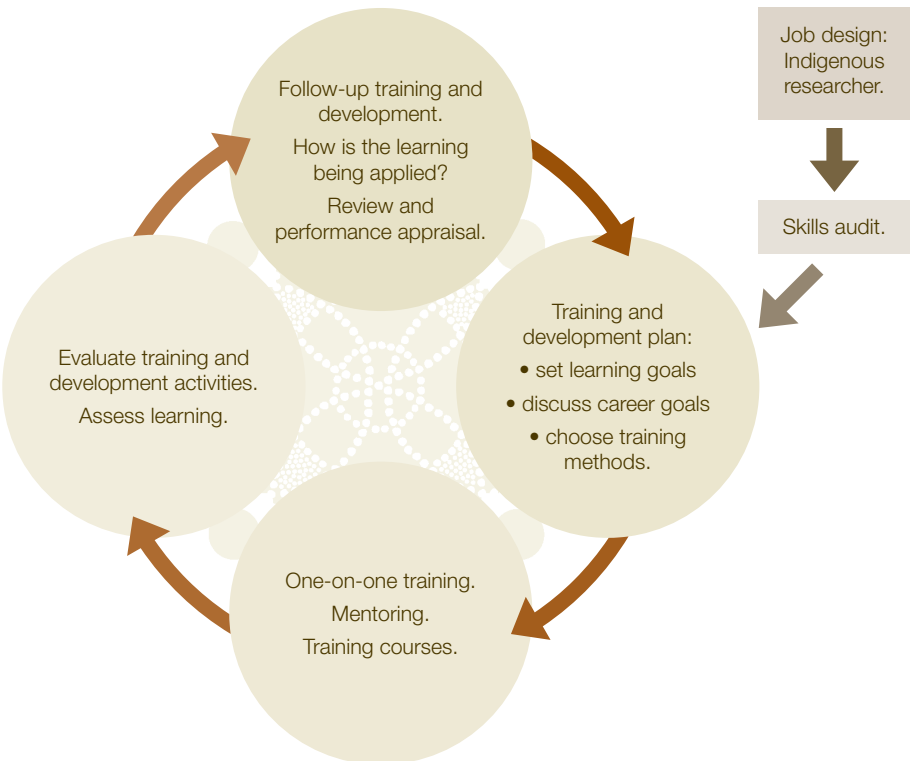
Both these documents, published by the Centre for General Practice and Rural Medicine at James Cook University, Townsville, are available via the Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet* website: **<www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html_bulletin/bull_33/bulletin_resources.htm>**.

RACP Mentoring Web Modules can be downloaded from The Royal Australian College of Physicians website: **<www.racp.edu.au/page/health-policy-and-advocacy/public-health-and-social-policy>**. The site has useful information and links to other mentoring resources.

The training and development cycle

An emerging researcher's training and professional development plan is based on the skills and knowledge needed to do the research job and the level of knowledge and skill a person brings to the job (assessed through a skills audit). As training and development activities are completed and learning is assessed, new plans are made for continuing training and development. The cycle and the learning continues.

Figure 1: The training and development cycle



Skills audit

A skills audit identifies:

- knowledge and skills an emerging researcher brings to the job
- strengths, as well as gaps, in the emerging researcher's abilities
- training and development needed to do the research well.

There are benefits in doing a skills audit when the Indigenous researcher starts:

- working through a skills audit together helps to set up the working and learning partnership, and to get to know each other's strengths and limitations
- a skills audit makes it clear that the supervisor or research leader has a support role
- a skills audit helps to set up a self-reflective way of working.

Just as it takes practice to facilitate a skills audit with confidence, it can be difficult to identify one's own skill or knowledge gaps. This is especially the case when new in a job, a work relationship or a workplace culture. Keep this in mind as you facilitate the process.

How to do a skills audit

The emerging researcher and supervisor/research leader do the skills audit together.

Step 1

Start with the job analysis and/or job description as outlined in Chapter 4, 'Planning the Research Job and Recruiting the Researcher', **p. 71**.

What are the main tasks involved in doing the job? This might be clear from the job description, but many descriptions are too general and you will need to work out exactly what each main task involves. For example, under the heading 'Research skills and techniques', the researcher may have responsibility for 'liaison between the research team and the community involved in the research'. A main task may be 'to obtain informed consent from community members and individuals to participate in the research'.

Step 2

Look at each main task and 'unpack' it. Record the specific knowledge, skills or competencies needed to carry out the task. For example, for the main task 'to obtain informed consent from community members and individuals to participate in the research', a researcher would need the following skills and knowledge:

- fully understand the research project, its implications and activities
- skills to give correct information, in a suitable format, about the research project to representatives of community organisations
- thorough knowledge of NHMRC ethical guidelines, especially the rights of research participants and others affected by the research
- understanding, as a researcher, of research values and the concerns of the community
- knowledge of the cultural or linguistic issues that might be involved in getting consent
- communication skills to listen, verify and respond to participants' concerns and questions.

Step 3

Talk about and document:

- any experience the researcher has of doing the task
- how he or she can show this knowledge or skill (evidence)
- the level of confidence to do the task.

It may be useful for the researcher to score his or her current level (e.g. on a scale of one to five). Scoring can help identify learning priorities. For example:

After the induction sessions I think I have a fair understanding of the project and what the research will involve. I need to sit down and go through the ethical guidelines with my supervisor, ask some questions and talk through what some of it really means for people. I'd need to do this before I could answer questions about it (from research participants). I understand what 'informed consent' means in a general way and why it is important, but I don't have any experience explaining 'informed consent' to a research participant. I will need some training to explain and use the form (self-scoring 2 out of 5).

Re-scoring after training can assess new learning.

The Skills Audit (University of Sussex n.d.), an example of a research skills audit, is available at the University of Sussex website: **<www.sussex.ac.uk/sp2/1-2-2.html>**. This skills audit is based on skills that Research Councils UK has defined as being necessary for a fully trained doctoral researcher. It can be downloaded and edited. The site also has a related 'training planner' and 'skills training record sheet'.

Individual training and development plan

Training and development planning is the next step after a skills audit. Like the skills audit, it is a one-on-one collaborative process between the emerging researcher and the supervisor. It focuses on individual learning needs rather than team training (although some training needs are likely to be shared with other team members).

Training and development planning is the next step after a skills audit. Like the skills audit, it is a collaborative process between the emerging researcher and the supervisor

The individual researcher's training and development plan needs to:

- address gaps in knowledge and skills needed for the Indigenous researcher's job
- avoid re-training in areas of competence
- be tailored to suit the emerging Indigenous researcher
- look at career direction and career goals.

The planning process looks at what needs to be learned. It considers learning priorities—the when. It also considers the best way of learning it—the how and where.

How to make a training and development plan

Step 1

Determine 'what' needs to be learned. Ask the following questions.

What skills and knowledge are needed to do this research job? Learning needs may have come from the skills audit or be identified through work planning and as the project develops. Learning needs include:

- Identified gaps in what the Indigenous researcher knows or understands.
- New skills that need to be learned.
- Skills that need to be strengthened to reach the level of competency needed for the research work.

What skills and knowledge are needed for the emerging Indigenous researcher's longer term development and career? Consider long-term goals and plans, including the skills that may be needed for research leadership and management.

Step 2

Determine 'when' skills need to be learned. Prioritise training and development. Ask questions such as:

- What training is essential now for getting on with the research job?
- Do some skills need to be learned in a sequence?
- Is there a fixed training schedule or enrolment date to consider?
- Are there project deadlines to work around?
- Are there medium and longer term learning needs to meet, and how do we make sure that day-to-day needs don't push the long-term plans off the agenda?

Step 3

Determine 'how' and 'where' the emerging researcher will undertake training and development.

List preferred training methods based on what works best for the individual researcher. Take into account:

- Personal learning style and study experience (e.g. Does the emerging researcher prefer learning by hands-on experiences, from books, or from visual images and presentations? Does the emerging researcher prefer to attend a workshop or to work beside a colleague?).
- How to balance work, learning, family and other commitments (e.g. Does the emerging researcher have a quiet place to study at home? Is it possible for the researcher to attend 'block' training courses away from home?).
- Available study resources (e.g. Does the emerging researcher have a computer at home to complete assignments and access the Internet? Does he or she have access to a computer at work? Does the emerging researcher live near a campus, or can he or she access distance education?).

The choice of training methods should also be based on proven best practice in teaching, and learning the skills in the particular health research setting, and what will work for the research team or organisation.

Step 4

Explore training and development options.

Research a wide range of learning options through workplace information, networks and contacts, and directories and websites. Look beyond the options that are most familiar to you and make collaborative decisions. Consider options such as:

- **On-the-job training.** Are suitable mentors and coaches available? Can we use a competency-based training approach, which leads to formal recognition and a qualification?
- **Courses offered outside the workplace.** Is there a suitable course available? Is it accessible? Are there course prerequisites? Is the timing right for meeting enrolment and course completion dates? Is financial support available to meet course costs?
- **Does training need to be customised by using a combination of course units and on-the-job training?**
- **How do longer term career goals influence the decision?** Is a formal qualification a priority for the researcher? Is the emerging researcher keen and able to commit to long-term study?

How will the different training options work within the research project timelines? How will the choice of options be influenced by, or impact on, other research team members, and how will we make it work?

Step 5

Record decisions on a training and development plan sheet.

Make a template if necessary and include details such as:

- Who makes various arrangements (e.g. registering for courses, booking accommodation).
- Who is responsible for overseeing the training and development plan and reviewing learning. Like all other supervision and support processes, best practice training and professional development needs continuous follow-up, review and adjustment.
- When the plan will be updated (this is usually part of a performance appraisal).

A training and development plan often includes a section for long-term learning and career goals, as well as a detailed plan to meet immediate training needs.

If someone steps outside their comfort zone and stuffs up, don't blame them. Ask ourselves how we can set up the environment to support them to get it right next time

Career planning

Career planning is part of training and development planning. Career planning is also part of a workplace performance appraisal.

Take time to focus beyond the skills and knowledge needed to do the research work and talk about what the researcher would like to be doing in the longer term. Talking about work direction and personal goals makes it easier to work out the best training options and most suitable courses to study (when relevant). It helps you to plan how the workplace can support a person's long-term goals.

It is important to talk about career path with new researchers. Our staff can start as research assistants, taking on more responsibility as they develop knowledge, skills and research experience. Emerging researchers can work up to a project coordinator role and eventually become chief investigators. As well as offering on-the-job and formal training through our organisation, we need to make sure there are challenges to push people along. The important thing is a positive environment. If someone steps outside their comfort zone and stuffs up, don't blame them. Ask ourselves how we can set up the environment to support them to get it right next time (Ross Andrews, Project Manager, Menzies School of Health Research, Northern Territory).

For people planning a career in research or academia, it is important to learn about research culture and to get a track record in research. You can support a researcher's career goals in a number of practical ways, such as:

- supporting opportunities to author or co-author publications
- getting the researcher involved in writing research proposals and ethics applications
- matching the researcher with a mentor who has a relevant role
- arranging a short-term work placement
- supporting opportunities to attend relevant conferences and other events.

} See 'Tips for workplace supervisors' in Chapter 2, 'Workplace Supervision', **p. 34**.

Career goals can easily get lost in day-to-day and month-to-month work priorities, so it is important to record them and review them regularly.

We need career advice and roadmaps for each employee. Mentoring and support to see the best way forward—do it, have a spell then go on for more (CRCAH 2005:20).

Case story—Planning for professional and career development

The following case story describes how a research workplace can provide informal professional development opportunities.

Mark Mayo: About building confidence and being given opportunities

Career and professional development is done in-house. Things like people asking you about presenting your work and then giving you the opportunities to present—for myself, I have presented at the World Melioidosis Congress in Thailand in 2007. I don't feel like my work is good enough to go and present, but then you have people like Bart and other people in the workplace encouraging you, saying things like, 'excellent work, people need to hear about this'. For me, this was particularly important—because your self-confidence may be low, and you may shy away from doing this.

It even starts off with just the in-house lab presentations we have. When I first started doing those it was pretty scary but if you don't do it then you don't get that opportunity, you don't get the feedback—and the feedback has always been good. People are always positive, you know, you slowly pick things up. As you're doing it you're watching other people. If I didn't present early on in my career, I wouldn't be able to present because I never liked public speaking. People say I do alright now but I still get very nervous every time.

About career goals and planning

I did a Bachelor of Science, and from then I've just been working away on projects and moving my way up. I am currently the project manager of the Melioidosis project at Menzies. I handle all the budgets, keep track of people's workloads and tasks, I look after the day-to-day needs of the staff in my project, I still maintain lab work and also do public relations work for the laboratory. I'm also involved in the NHMRC grant writing. I'm a chief investigator on two grants so far. Normally it's the PhD people that do that, so that's good for my [career].

There's been no written down timeline for my project management side of things. It's just been working through the different aspects of project management at Menzies and slowly building it up and getting me to a point where I can start taking the next steps on my own. That's where I am now. I'm at a time where I do a lot of different tasks in the workplace, but I'm probably not doing them the best I can. I'm hoping to do a management course Menzies is offering. This will give me vital skills to be a better manager.

This year I had a choice to do a Masters or still work on what I'm doing, I've decided to work on the project while keeping my options open… to see what direction I want to take in the future.

Bart Currie: About planning and supporting skill development

For Mark, there have been two aspects to skill development—the technical skills in the laboratory and management skills. Early on it was clear that Mark really liked the organisational and administration side of things, while also understanding the laboratory aspect.

With technical skill development, one of the first things we were doing was trying to develop what's called a molecular typing system… I know the theory behind it, but I'm not a laboratory person. Mark took to this really early on, and developed for this Melioidosis bacteria a typing method— he had the 'green thumbs' for this sort of stuff and he had a lot of support from other lab people in relation to that. It was through laboratory staff, and through the published literature, that he was able to adapt this method for molecular typing of the bacteria. We got a number of important publications out of that, and that method is still very robust.

In the lab Mark was increasingly involved with database management, and managing the budgets and the projects. He took on responsibilities for management… he started working with our finance people [with] current budgets, and then projecting budgets. And there was the [information technology] side, around the databases… We were using the expertise within Menzies to increase his skill level in those areas.

About supporting career development

Within our Melioidosis project—of which Mark's now the overall manager and a chief investigator [CI]—there are a couple of areas where he is particularly driving that research interest. Having Mark as a CI on that was important from the beginning, because he [has] a substantial amount of responsibility. Only four of us are CIs, and the other people in the lab, one of whom has a PhD, are just working for the program. So being a chief investigator is a major achievement. And there are clearly the advantages of Mark's local knowledge, which are enormously important for us in relation to that local knowledge being both Indigenous and long-term Darwin.

When I first started doing in-house presentations it was pretty scary, but if you don't do it then you don't get that opportunity [to be encouraged and develop self-confidence] … you don't get the feedback

Mark has not wanted to pursue a PhD… we have talked it through, but he is interested in the possibility of management courses. Mark is aware of all of those different options, and there'll come a time where he may well feel that that's the right thing to do. It may be that the Melioidosis study can go on for a long time. But there will be other options, [and] other opportunities within Menzies if that's what he wants to do. There are probably opportunities in industry as well.

[Mark's learning and career development has] been like a natural progression. I think the core of it is that it's such an exciting area that we are both so enthusiastic about. And… it's a niche area. Mark can be confident that he knows more about soil samplings for Melioidosis than everyone else in the world, except for one person in Thailand—Lek Vanaporn Wuthiekanun has become a friend of his and has visited us here and Mark has also visited and been in workshops with her in Thailand. She and Mark are the two world experts.

Mark Mayo won the 2008 Ryan Prize for Outstanding Contribution to Menzies School of Health Research.

Education and training options

There are many training providers, different types of training and different ways of offering training. The challenge is to find or arrange the type of training that best meets the needs of the learner and the research project. Courses specifically designed for Indigenous researchers in health may not be widely offered, but combinations of course units and other training options can be used.

On-the-job training includes:

- one-on-one supervision, coaching and mentoring
- competency-based training
- customised courses delivered by registered training organisations and consultants
- traineeship arrangements and work placements.

Courses include:

- higher education courses—undergraduate and postgraduate university courses
- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses—certificate and diploma level
- course units within TVET or higher education courses, which are sometimes offered as standalone training courses, including short residential training workshops.

There are different modes of course delivery such as on-campus, online or distance learning, or combinations (often called mixed-mode delivery).

Options for funding the emerging researcher's training include professional development funding through the project or workplace, sponsorships, scholarships or bursaries.

You will need to explore different course and training options and take into account the emerging researcher's personal preferences, education and career goals.

I joined the team at Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs… as a Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development trainee researcher… I have had a varied employment history, with various skills that have enabled me to be successful in accessing this traineeship. While I have no academic qualifications, I believe that this traineeship will be an opportunity to access higher education and advance myself both professionally and personally (Mentha 2005:885).

On-the-job training

On-the-job research training takes advantage of the knowledge and skills of experienced researchers in the project team. Benefits include:

- learning skills and knowledge that are directly relevant to the job
- making learning real and practical, and linking theory and practice
- the opportunity to practise under expert supervision
- flexibility, because it can be scheduled around research project phases and trainer availability
- the possibility of it leading to formal qualifications when it is competency based, or linked to coursework.

The simplest method of on-the-job training is coaching (hands-on daily supervision).

An on-the-job training program needs to be carefully planned and documented. For example, a program might list tasks or competencies to be achieved. Using a skills training record sheet enables activities or competencies to be signed-off (by the teacher and the learner) when completed.

Some learners also keep a folio to show evidence of what has been learned, and samples of work.

Carolyn Thompson (left) and Tricia Nagel

Case story—On-the-job learning

The following case story by **Carolyn Thompson** describes how learning tasks are set and the level of skill and knowledge tracked on-the-job. The tasks focus on ways to build on the theory learned through formal study.

Carolyn is an Indigenous Research Officer and a member of the Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative (AIMhi) team in the Northern Territory. Her supervisor is **Tricia Nagel**, who is Chief Investigator for the Northern Territory Indigenous AIMhi project and Leader, Healing and Resilience Research Division, Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin.

Over the last two years I've learned how to do literature research, learned how to do a project proposal and how to fill out forms for funding, and a little bit of basics on ethics, and project monitoring and then presenting it at the end; I've… done a lot of this through uni and now I want to practise it a little bit… So Tricia did up this form of what's required within the project and in our area. She put all these things down and she's marking off how much of it I've done or whether I've just got an awareness and understanding or I actually did it. So we've made up this form with all these things and just slowly… approach each one.

[My supervisor has] written 'project proposal', 'funding submission', 'ethics application', 'literature research', 'journal article', you know, just a list of things like that. Then she's put underneath that, 'awareness, understanding'—partially or half, or whether I completed it and did well. So, marking off each little bit that we've done. Once a week we go through that. We usually meet on a Monday.

If [supervisors] could share responsibilities with us… and encourage us that we're not looking for this brilliant thing straight out, but 'this is just for your own purpose and for you to practise and to learn', it would be good to assist in small ways [in other projects] just to get the practice of using a lot of these forms and understanding them

I like the way we're working, starting to practise doing things. Tricia would give me things and say, 'How do you think you would go with this?' And I'd say, 'Well, look, I'll take it and give it a go—I mightn't come up with a paragraph as long as you would, but it's a beginning for me.' So, I think if [supervisors] could share responsibilities with us… and encourage us that we're not looking for this brilliant thing straight out, but 'this is just for your own purpose and for you to practise and to learn', it would be good to assist in small ways [in other projects] just to get the practice of using a lot of these forms and understanding them. It's easier in your own area, but the more practice you can get, the better.

We've started doing up a few ethics applications. Tricia said, 'You start filling out the questions to how you see it, what you think'. Then we both go through it and she'd see if I'm on track or what I could have possibly added or not. And then the good thing about doing the ethics is I've had lots of chats with Maria [Ethics Officer]. I've been learning a lot from her as in what's required… I'd find the language different so that sometimes the question throws me out. And that's when usually I go and see Maria and she'd explain and I'd go, 'Oh, okay, I've done that there'.

I feel I'm getting a bit more proactive now [in my own learning], that I'm getting an understanding of what research is and what I have to do… Before, I'd rely on [my supervisor] handing it to me. But I'm starting to develop my own way of how and what I'd like to look at, and that's only just starting to happen now. I think about it, look at what I'm doing and then I think what else could I look at in here… now I'm starting to create my tasks.

Case story—Designing on-the-job research training

Combinations of course units and on-the-job supervision and training activities can be put together to design a training program that meets learning needs in a specific research project.

Fran Baum is a Professor and Head of the Department of Public Health at Flinders University and a CRCAH Program Leader, Social Determinants of Health Program. She discusses one experience of on-the-job research training.

This on-the-job training plan was prepared as a 'Provisional framework for capacity development and knowledge transfer' for the research project 'Location, social capital and health: Indigenous perspectives on suburban Australia'. The research was done in Adelaide.

In the planning stage of the research project, the project leader and established team members did a job analysis to work out the skills and knowledge a researcher would need to do the job. A provisional framework was put together, setting out how an emerging researcher's training needs could be met in two ways, using:

- *specialised skills and knowledge of people in the project team*
- *short courses offered by the South Australian Community Health Research Unit and Department of Public Health, Flinders University School of Medicine.*

When the researcher was recruited, a skills audit identified his strengths and training needs. The provisional training framework, as shown in the table, was adjusted and put into action.

Skills and knowledge to be acquired	Research project context	Team member responsible
Health inequities theory	Individual supervision and group discussion	All
Social capital theory	Individual supervision	Project leader + member with expertise in social capital
Review of literature on race and whiteness and its relationship to social capital	Individual support in order to contribute understanding of theoretical perspectives to the questions in case studies	Team member expert in ethnographic methods, anthropological theory
Project planning and implementation skills	Individual supervision and guidance with organising and managing embedded case studies, monitoring budgets etc.*	All
Demographic analysis (and mapping)	One-on-one training for documentation in case study areas*	Team expert demographic analysis
Analysis of independent measures	One-on-one training for documentation in case study areas*	Expert in housing and urban studies, demographic analysis and population health
Observational data collection techniques and analysis	Individual supervision to develop description of case study areas from Aboriginal perspective*	Expert in ethnographic methods, anthropological theory
In-depth interview and focus group data collection and analysis	Individual supervision to develop embedded case studies in four areas*	Expert in qualitative research methods and evaluation
Survey techniques	One-on-one training in survey question design and analysis*	Member with specialist knowledge of literature and debates relating to social capital
Engagement with policy makers	Individual supervision to facilitate research transfer to community members and policy decision makers	Project leader
Report and publication writing	Individual supervision in writing-up of findings for dissemination	Members with specialist knowledge of the literature and debates relating to social capital + expertise in qualitative research methods and evaluation
Presentation skills	Support and feedback on co-presentation of findings to peers and other audiences, e.g.: • conferences • workplace forums	As relevant

* Denotes skills areas in which additional training workshops and short courses are provided throughout the year by the South Australian Community Health Research Unit and Department of Public Health, Flinders University.

Competency-based training

Competency-based training enables a learner to be assessed on-the-job using an accredited, competency-based training package. This means that skills and knowledge can be recognised in a formal way. The recognition gives credit for the things the learner already knows and does well, or may have studied already, as well as for new learning. The assessment needs to be done by a qualified workplace assessor.

A person can build on units of competency and build on qualifications. For example, after completing a Certificate III course, the student can go on to complete more units for a Certificate IV qualification, and continue on to complete a diploma, if available.

General information about competency-based training can be found on the National Training Information Service website: **<www.ntis.gov.au/>**. You can investigate information about health and community services and other areas that are relevant to your research project.

Competency-based training is flexible, and can be tailored to suit research project needs.

Competency-based training assessment gives credit for the things the learner already knows and does well, or may have studied already, as well as for new learning

Healthy skin curriculum writer and educator Loyla Leysley (3rd from left) working with mothers and colleague at the Galiwin'ku Pre-school, Arnhemland, Northern Territory

Case story—Designing a tailored competency-based training program

The East Arnhem Healthy Skin Program is part of the CRCAH's Healthy Skin Program, coordinated through Menzies School of Health Research. It is an example of competency-based training designed to meet the needs of a project. The Healthy Skin training program has been very successful in building staff capacity and the work of trained staff has had an impact on health outcomes.

Ross Andrews, an Associate Professor and a Healthy Skin Program Leader, explains the success of the Healthy Skin Program Team.

Over the past three years, these [community health workers] have been involved in doing over 6000 skin checks on nearly 2500 children in… different regions of East Arnhemland. When they first started, forty-six children out of every 100 seen in their communities had skin sores. By the time we had finished, the skin sore burden had almost halved, equivalent to saving eighteen children in every 100 from skin sores (CRCAH 2008).

The East Arnhem Healthy Skin Program training

To set up the training, project staff at Menzies School of Health Research worked with the Human Services Training Advisory Council in Darwin. Menzies staff described the work to be carried out by the community workers, and the Advisory Council mapped these activities to nationally endorsed units of competency, which Menzies used as a base to put together the training program. Workers know their training meets a national standard and can lead to formal qualifications (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Population Health training).

Because the national units are broad, they allow for training to be based on the needs of the Healthy Skin Program and the local community. The training plan is for the whole team, and the competency of each worker is assessed.

Learning Program 1: Orientation to Healthy Skin Work—Off the Job
Orientation to Healthy Skin Work—On the Job

Learning Program 2: The Healthy Skin Story

Learning Program 3: Exploring the Healthy Skin Program

Learning Program 4: Sharing Health Information

As an example, the table shows Learning Program 4, which is based on a national unit of competency

Unit CHCHPROM1A: Share Health Information

Elements		Performance Criteria	
1	Identify health information requirements	1.1	Information is obtained from key people about community health needs
		1.2	Discussions are held with key people
		1.3	Levels of health information in the community are assessed and documented according to organisational guidelines
		1.4	Gaps in available information are identified and listed
		1.5	Community health information needs are determined and prioritised
2	Develop health information in an appropriate context	2.1	Negotiation about location, time and place for sharing health information occurs with key people
		2.2	Resources are prepared and assembled in consultation with key people
		2.3	Information is developed using techniques appropriate to the target audience
3	Implement sharing of health information	3.1	Health information is delivered in a clear and concise manner
		3.2	Health information is delivered in a place that is negotiated with the target audience
		3.3	Feedback is obtained from the audience to determine whether information is correctly received
4	Evaluation presentation of health information	4.1	Progress and/or outcome is reviewed against community needs, in consultation with key people
		4.2	Suggestions for improving the methodology of sharing health information are made to key people
		4.3	Changes to methodology are implemented in consultation with key people as required

Short courses and training events

Short courses in specific areas of health and research are available through universities and other training providers, including government departments and research networks. Course offerings change in response to changing service needs.

Single course units within university courses are sometimes offered as stand-alone courses or workshops. There may be an option to be assessed or not, depending on whether the researcher is an enrolled student at the university. Attending courses away from the workplace is also a good way for emerging researchers to build professional networks.

To find out about short courses and training events:

- Use your researcher networks and email lists to circulate professional development information.
- Subscribe to relevant newsletters (e.g. CRCAH's *Gwalwa-Gai*).
- Keep up-to-date with courses and training events offered through Indigenous community-controlled health services (you can find these through NACCHO state affiliates at the NACCHO website: **<www.naccho.org.au/>**.
- Investigate what courses are being offered through Indigenous research centres within universities (e.g. Onemda VicHealth Koori Health Unit, James Cook University Indigenous Health Unit, Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Kulunga Research Network at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research in Western Australia, Centre for Remote Health in Central Australia, and Menzies School of Health Research in the Northern Territory).
- Keep up-to-date with policy directions and strategic approaches in research training (e.g. Primary Health Care Research, Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) Strategy, which funds research training across states and territories—host organisations can be found at: **<www.phcris.org.au/phcred/>**).
- Check for relevant training information on government websites (e.g. the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation at: **<www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/>**.

Distance and online learning

Distance and online learning can be well suited to people who are self-motivated and who juggle family life, study and work. There is flexibility about when training is accessed and, in many cases, no requirement to attend a course venue. However, it can be an isolating way to study.

An example of distance learning is the package of online research modules offered through Queensland PHCRED and James Cook University: **<www.som.uq.edu.au/research/phcredqld/research_modules.htm>**.

Other universities also offer graduate certificates in health by external studies, with course units or specialisation in research. Higher level postgraduate courses are available to health researchers by distance learning.

Consider ways to support emerging researchers with distance learning courses such as by:

- allocating work time to complete coursework
- providing access to online resources through workplace computers
- offering tutoring support from co-workers
- helping students link up with others who are completing the course and live in the region.

Use your researcher networks and email lists to circulate professional development information

Graduates of the *Certificate IV Indigenous Research Capacity Building* course, from left: James Coulthard-Stanley, Dawn Likouresis, Merridy Malin (trainer), Joe Stanley, Roxanne Miller, Belinda Richards, Lucy Evans, Emma Richards, Noeleen Lester, Sharon Perkins, Darryl Cameron and Tina Couzens-Quitadamo

Case story—Supporting research training for frontline workers

In this case story, research training is delivered through a 'mixed-mode'—a combination of workshops and distance learning. **Merridy Malin**, the trainer, writes about the challenges of providing study support in workplaces where people have demanding frontline jobs. Merridy is the Research Education Officer with the Centre for Clinical Research Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health at the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia.

The Registered Training Organisation at the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia has been running the Certificate IV in Indigenous Research Capacity Building over 2007–08. The course is nationally accredited to James Cook University and we are piloting it for them with our students who are primarily Aboriginal Health Workers from health services, mostly in rural and regional areas.

The course offers basic strategies for research and evaluation, including the ethics and appropriate protocols in Aboriginal health services and communities, and builds upon the skills and knowledge that the students already have and share. The students come into Adelaide for four workshops of four days each, spread over the year. Then the rest of the year they conduct their research or evaluation projects, within their workplaces, as part of their everyday work. The entire research process is detailed in twelve workbooks

which we have written and which the students can refer to when they are back in their workplaces and communities. We also send out packages of readings and research tools between workshops.

It has been a challenge to provide adequate supervision and support. A few students have mentors located nearby who offer invaluable support. These mentors are university lecturers, medical researchers and health service personnel with research backgrounds and they volunteer their time on top of their everyday work. Where more than one student is in an organisation, they tend to support each other. The [Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia]-based lecturer visits students in most of the regional centres, but funding limits this to one visit per centre per semester. The rest of the time, the lecturers and students communicate with each other via phone, email, fax and the posted packages.

When visiting students on site or even ringing them at work, it has been very important to not 'get in the way'. These visits need to be carefully timed and focused so as not to be too disruptive to people's important work roles. Taking food to share over lunch is one way of rewarding people for giving up their much-needed relaxation time for their study and they do appreciate these visits.

Twelve students graduated from the full-time Certificate IV Indigenous Research Capacity Building course in August 2008. Sixteen students completed the short course in 'Action Research and Evaluation' (three elements of competency from the Certificate IV course).

When visiting students on site or even ringing them at work, it has been very important to not 'get in the way'. These visits need to be carefully timed and focused so as not to be too disruptive to people's important work roles

Customised training events for research teams

Some registered trainers will customise courses to suit the needs of learner groups. Training delivery can be expensive, especially if travel is involved. But it can be cost effective if a whole research or workplace team participates and the training is directly relevant to needs.

With the right supervision and support, preparing and delivering presentations at conferences can provide valuable professional development for emerging researchers

Conferences and seminars

Conferences, forums and seminars can offer good professional development and networking opportunities, but often at a high cost in relation to the benefit for an individual researcher.

> *Make sure that conferences have reputable speakers and will offer opportunities for real benefit in terms of knowledge transfer and collaboration and cultural safety. If unsure, use your networks and ask around* (Diane Walker, Capacity Development Officer, CRCAH).

With the right supervision and support, preparing and delivering presentations at conferences can provide valuable professional development for emerging researchers.

Work placements

Research work placements may be part of an informal learning program or a formal study program, as shown in the case story.

Scott Winch

Case story—A research work placement and postgraduate study program

In 2007 the Menzies School of Health Research, the CRCAH and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing created a placement for an Indigenous researcher to do a Master of Applied Epidemiology (MAE) through the Australian National University. The student is supported through a well-structured and challenging research program.

Scott Winch, a Wiradjiri man from Wollongong in New South Wales, started his two-year placement with the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin in 2007.

My placement for the MAE is under the Child Health Division of Menzies School of Health Research, with Ross Andrews [as] my supervisor. The projects I am working on include data analysis of the burden of diarrhoeal disease in East Arnhem, a surveillance system evaluation under the PneuMum study, looking at protective and risk factors for commencing and ceasing petrol sniffing, and the evaluation of an Indigenous Reference Group that supports the PneuMum study. Investigating an infectious disease outbreak is part of the program.

The MAE has been extremely challenging, particularly statistical software analysis of data and learning how to use statistical and analytical software packages. Despite the challenges, I value the opportunity to learn skills that I will utilise in my future career.

University courses

Universities around Australia offer course units in research and Indigenous health within undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and postgraduate research studies.

Course offerings change from year to year and modes of delivery vary between universities. University websites and handbooks provide current information.

While investigating courses and universities, emerging researchers can be encouraged to talk to other Indigenous students about their study experiences, and to find out about Indigenous networks and student support services within each university.

A 2005 study of Indigenous students' university experiences revealed that 'the most positive form of support for Indigenous students on their journey through the university is provided by the Indigenous units' (Herbert 2005:11).

Scholarships

Various scholarships are available for emerging researchers in Indigenous health. The organisations that provide scholarships are usually proactive in promoting these opportunities.

Scholarship offerings change, so the best strategy is to search out current information:

- Ask your research networks and use word-of-mouth.
- See research funding information available through your own organisation, or the university aligned with your organisation.
- Check university websites for offers of bursaries and scholarship opportunities for Indigenous students.
- Check the scholarship opportunities promoted in professional journals and newsletters.
- Visit the website of the Joint Academic Scholarship Online Network (JASON **<www.jason.edu.au/>**), which is a postgraduate scholarship search engine—scholarships in the database apply to Australian students wishing to study at home or abroad, and to international students wishing to study in Australia.

- See international search engines that are specifically about research, including funding and scholarship opportunities, such as 'ResearchResearch—newspaper for the research world': **<www.researchresearch.com/>**. You need to be a registered user, but universities subscribe to these sites.
- Update your knowledge about scholarships available through Australian funding agencies such as NHMRC, National Heart Foundation, Kidney Health Australia and Australian Rotary Health.
- Do a simple web search using terms such as 'Indigenous health scholarships'—a search will find information about opportunities through specific universities, education partnerships and so on.

Our way of working is reciprocal; we learn from each other... it is about friendship, trust, mutual respect and camaraderie

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‘The guide will be an invaluable tool for people such as myself and also non-Indigenous researchers, as they will get a better understanding of how Indigenous people who are involved in research are held accountable by their communities.’
Jack Bulman, Mibbinbah Research Program Manager

‘This represents a tremendous amount of work and cooperation from a wide variety of people. The tone... is one of exploration and possibility rather than being too directive... There is an understanding that there are many ways of doing things.’
Rick Hayes, Senior Lecturer, La Trobe University

‘This publication tells a story of “how it is”… It has resonance to the broader research sector and should find its way out beyond the health research arena.’
Peter Stephenson, Head of Research, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

‘Everything in here is exactly what I needed to know when I started working in Indigenous health research, but learnt through trial and error instead.’
Phyllis Lau, Department of General Practice, The University of Melbourne

‘… one of the best reads—engaging, immediate, explanatory and helpful.’
Kym Kilroy & Megan Williams, Indigenous Health Unit, The University of Queensland

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