

YARNOUP

NAVIGATING 26TH JANUARY

A Comprehensive Organisational Guide



Introduction

Creating an inclusive and culturally aware workplace is essential for fostering respect and collaboration among diverse employees.

Organisations are increasingly recognising the need for thoughtful, informed strategies to acknowledge the complex significance of 26th January. This guide provides actionable steps to navigate the date with cultural sensitivity, foster inclusion, and support reconciliation goals.

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Section 1: Overview

Overview

26th January represents a day of complex significance for Australians. While it is celebrated as a public holiday, it is also a day of mourning for many First Nations peoples, symbolising the beginning of colonisation.

This guide outlines frameworks for organisations to engage in meaningful consultation, develop inclusive policies, and demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation.

Understanding the Context

Understanding 26th January requires reflecting on its complex history and the diverse meanings it holds for communities across Australia.

For some, it is a public holiday associated with national pride, while for others, it marks a time of mourning and resilience. By recognising this complexity, organisations can approach this date with greater cultural awareness and sensitivity.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On 26th January, 1788, the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove, marking the beginning of British colonisation. For First Nations peoples, this day is a reminder of dispossession, cultural disruption, and resilience. Over time, 26th January has evolved into a focal point for national debates about identity and reconciliation.

FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES

- For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 26th January marks the beginning of colonisation, dispossession, and the profound disruption of traditional cultures and ways of life
- The date is often referred to as "Invasion Day" or "Survival Day," acknowledging both the historical impact of colonisation and the resilience of First Nations peoples
- Many communities observe this date through protest, cultural ceremonies, and events that celebrate survival and continuing connection to Country

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

- The date wasn't consistently celebrated across all Australian colonies in the early years
- It wasn't until 1994 that 26th January became a national public holiday consistently celebrated across all states and territories
- The first "Day of Mourning" was held by Aboriginal people in 1938, marking 150 years since colonisation
- The debate about the appropriateness of the date has intensified in recent years, leading to increased public discourse about potential alternative dates

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Increasingly, Australians are engaging in discussions about 26th January and its meaning. Organisations, local councils, and community groups are adopting more inclusive approaches, reflecting a broader commitment to cultural awareness and reconciliation.

- Australia's population today reflects diverse backgrounds, with over a quarter of Australians born overseas
- Growing recognition of First Nations perspectives has led to evolving attitudes toward 26th January
- Many local councils and organisations are adopting more inclusive approaches to marking the date
- There is ongoing national dialogue about how to acknowledge both Australia's colonial history and its ancient First Nations heritage
- The date continues to prompt important discussions about national identity, reconciliation, and what it means to be Australian

Organisational Approaches

Creating an inclusive and culturally aware workplace requires intentional strategies that address the layered meaning of 26th January. This section outlines practical approaches, from meaningful consultation and policy development to leadership engagement and community collaboration, helping organisations foster respectful and inclusive environments.



Consultation Framework

ENGAGING WITH EMPLOYEES AND COMMUNITIES

Effective consultation is at the heart of inclusive policy development. Establishing working groups with diverse representation, creating culturally safe spaces for dialogue, and maintaining ongoing engagement are essential steps.

INTERNAL CONSULTATION

- Establish working groups that include First Nations staff, cultural advisors, and diverse employee representatives
- Create safe spaces for staff to share their perspectives and experiences
- Ensure consultation processes are culturally appropriate and respectful
- Document and incorporate feedback into policy development
- Recognise that consultation is an ongoing process, not a one-time event

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Build relationships with local First Nations communities and organisations
- Seek guidance from First Nations leaders and Elders
- Participate in community-led initiatives and discussions
- Support Indigenous-led events and programs
- Maintain ongoing dialogue beyond 26th January

LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

- Secure commitment from senior leadership for meaningful change
- Ensure leaders understand the historical context and current perspectives
- Develop cultural competency at all leadership levels
- Align 26th January approaches with broader reconciliation goals
- Foster open dialogue about organisational values and responsibilities

Policy Development

Flexible holiday policies can accommodate employees who wish to work on 26th January and substitute it for a day of personal or cultural significance.

Organisations should ensure these policies align with legal requirements, operational needs, and employee feedback.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE

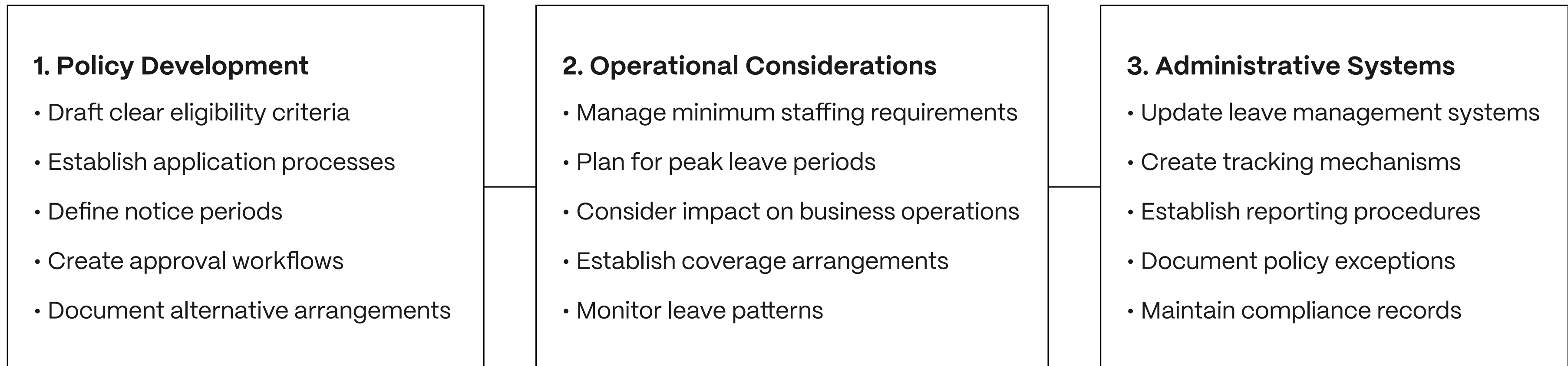
- Ensure alignment with National Employment Standards (NES)
- Review relevant awards and enterprise agreements
- Consider consultation requirements under workplace instruments
- Document compliance measures and legal review processes
- Maintain records of agreements and arrangements

POLICY OPTIONS

Organisations can consider several approaches:

- **Full substitution:** Allowing employees to work 26th January and take another day off
- **Floating cultural leave:** Broader policy allowing substitution of any public holiday
- **Additional leave:** Providing extra leave days for cultural observance
- **Hybrid approaches:** Combining different elements based on organisational needs

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES:



1. Policy Development

- Draft clear eligibility criteria
- Establish application processes
- Define notice periods
- Create approval workflows
- Document alternative arrangements

2. Operational Considerations

- Manage minimum staffing requirements
- Plan for peak leave periods
- Consider impact on business operations
- Establish coverage arrangements
- Monitor leave patterns

3. Administrative Systems

- Update leave management systems
- Create tracking mechanisms
- Establish reporting procedures
- Document policy exceptions
- Maintain compliance records

Support Systems

Providing culturally safe workplaces includes offering employee assistance programs, creating private spaces for reflection, and developing support networks for First Nations employees and allies.

CULTURAL SAFETY MEASURES

- Establish culturally safe workspaces
- Create protocols for sensitive discussions
- Provide private spaces for reflection or discussion
- Develop cultural safety guidelines
- Train managers in cultural safety principles

SUPPORT SERVICES

1. Employee Assistance Programs

- Ensure culturally appropriate counselling options
- Provide access to Indigenous counsellors
- Offer multilingual services
- Include family support options
- Maintain confidential access processes

2. Internal Support Networks

- Establish First Nations employee networks
- Create ally support groups
- Facilitate mentoring programs
- Enable peer support systems
- Provide resources for network activities

HR PROCESSES

- Develop clear escalation pathways
- Create confidential reporting mechanisms
- Establish review procedures
- Maintain support documentation
- Monitor effectiveness of support systems

Educational Framework

Building a culturally aware and inclusive organisation requires more than policies; it demands a commitment to ongoing learning and education. By equipping employees and leaders with the knowledge and tools to engage with First Nations perspectives, organisations can foster deeper understanding and stronger relationships.

This section outlines structured and ongoing educational strategies to support cultural competency at all levels of your organisation.

CULTURAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

Structured Learning

- Cultural awareness training
- Historical context education
- Cultural protocols training
- Leadership development programs
- Team-based learning sessions

External Programs

- Partner with Indigenous organisations
- Engage cultural education providers
- Participate in community programs
- Support external learning opportunities
- Build ongoing relationships

ONGOING EDUCATION

- Develop year-round learning calendars
- Create regular discussion forums
- Establish knowledge-sharing platforms
- Maintain resource libraries
- Update materials regularly

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Internal Resources

- Create digital learning materials
- Develop manager guides
- Produce team discussion tools
- Build internal knowledge base
- Design self-paced learning modules

External Resources

- Partner with educational providers
- Source community materials
- Access expert content
- Subscribe to relevant publications
- Maintain resource currency

Key Principles for Policy Frameworks

To ensure the success and longevity of your organisational policies, it is crucial to adopt a strategic and thoughtful approach.

Policies addressing 26th January or similar culturally significant matters should be designed with inclusivity, practicality, and sustainability in mind.

The following principles outline essential considerations for effective policy development and implementation:

- Regularly reviewed and updated
- Developed through consultation
- Clearly documented
- Consistently applied
- Effectively communicated

Organisations should ensure all policies are:

- Inclusive and respectful
- Practically implementable
- Legally compliant
- Regularly evaluated
- Sustainably resourced

Implementation Examples

Learning from the examples set by other organisations can provide valuable insights for your own approach. This section highlights real-world case studies of how diverse organisations have successfully implemented inclusive practices and flexible policies around 26th January, offering lessons and strategies that can be tailored to your context.

EDUCATIONAL SECTOR LEADERSHIP

University of Wollongong's Pioneering Approach

The University of Wollongong became the first tertiary institution in Australia to implement flexible arrangements for 26th January, offering valuable insights for other organisations.

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

- Fixed-term and permanent employees can choose to work on 26th January
- Alternative days off available on January 27th or 30th
- Policy developed through comprehensive consultation with staff unions
- Clear communication of policy rationale acknowledging the date's complex significance

KEY PROCESS ELEMENTS

- Extensive stakeholder consultation
- Clear policy documentation
- Flexible implementation timeframe
- Strong support from university leadership

OUTCOMES AND LEARNINGS

- Positive reception from staff and broader community
- Importance of clear communication channels
- Value of union engagement in policy development
- Need for robust administrative systems

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

Telstra's Comprehensive Approach

Telstra has demonstrated how large organisations can implement meaningful change through clear leadership and comprehensive policy development.

LEADERSHIP AND COMPREHENSIVE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

"I'm proud that at Telstra, our people can now choose to take January 26 as a public holiday or work that day and request an alternative day off. For many First Nations peoples, Australia Day is a painful reminder of discrimination and exclusion. It marks a turning point that saw lives lost, culture devalued, and connections between people and places destroyed."

- CEO Leadership: In the words of Telstra CEO Vicki Brady

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY:

- Clear executive sponsorship
- Comprehensive communication plan
- Integration with existing diversity initiatives
- Support systems for employees and managers

KEY SUCCESS FACTORS:

- Strong leadership commitment
- Clear policy communication
- Employee choice and flexibility
- Integration with broader cultural initiatives

ALL INDUSTRIES

Other Industry Leaders

Many organisations across various industries have taken meaningful steps to address the complexities of 26th January.

These examples showcase how diverse sectors are approaching cultural sensitivity and inclusion through innovative policies, strong leadership, and comprehensive consultation. By learning from their experiences, your organisation can adapt proven strategies to your unique context and reconciliation goals.

KPMG

Key Elements:

- Comprehensive flexible holiday policy
- Part of broader inclusion strategy
- Focus on cultural awareness
- Employee-led implementation

Notable Features:

- Integration with existing policies
- Strong consultation process
- Clear communication framework
- Ongoing support systems

NETWORK TEN

Implementation Highlights:

- Media industry leadership
- Clear policy communication
- Support for diverse perspectives
- Integration with broader cultural initiatives

Key Learnings:

- Importance of clear messaging
- Value of employee consultation
- Need for ongoing support
- Benefits of leadership commitment

WOODSIDE ENERGY

Approach:

- Resources sector leadership
- Strong consultation process
- Integration with reconciliation initiatives
- Clear implementation framework

Success Factors:

- Strong leadership support
- Comprehensive consultation
- Clear policy documentation
- Ongoing evaluation

Common Success Factors

LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

- Clear executive sponsorship
- Visible leadership support
- Consistent messaging
- Resource allocation

COMPREHENSIVE CONSULTATION

- Engagement with First Nations staff
- Broader employee consultation
- Union involvement where applicable
- Community engagement

CLEAR COMMUNICATION

- Multiple communication channels
- Consistent messaging
- Regular updates
- Support for managers

ROBUST IMPLEMENTATION

- Clear policies and procedures
- System adaptations
- Training and support
- Ongoing evaluation

ONGOING SUPPORT

- Cultural safety measures
- Employee support services
- Manager resources
- Regular review and adjustment

Implementation Learnings

Organisations implementing flexible approaches to 26th January have identified several key learnings.

These examples demonstrate that successful implementation requires careful planning, strong leadership commitment, comprehensive consultation, and ongoing support. Organisations can adapt these learnings to their own context while maintaining focus on respectful engagement and meaningful change.

- 1 Start consultation early and make it comprehensive
- 2 Ensure strong leadership commitment and visibility
- 3 Provide clear communication at all stages
- 4 Develop robust support systems
- 5 Plan for long-term sustainability
- 6 Monitor and adjust based on feedback
- 7 Maintain ongoing dialogue with stakeholders

Contact Us

For support or questions about implementing strategies surrounding 26th January or any other dates of significance, please get in touch.

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