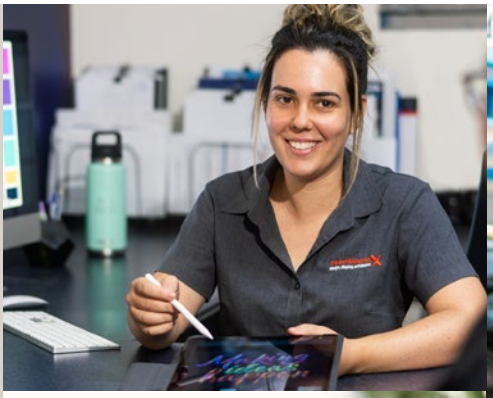










BUILDING A BIGGER, BETTER WORKFORCE

Northern Territory
Workforce Development Strategy 2026-2036

NORTHERN TERRITORY GOVERNMENT


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Minister's Foreword

The Northern Territory's greatest strength is its people. A skilled, capable and adaptable workforce is essential to delivering strong economic growth, resilient communities and improved outcomes for all Territorians.

The Building a Bigger, Better Workforce Strategy, the first whole-of-Territory Workforce Development Strategy, provides a clear, coordinated framework to build, attract and retain the workforce our Territory needs—now and into the future—and supports the Government's priority to rebuild the economy.

This Strategy has been informed by extensive engagement with industry, employers, training providers, Aboriginal organisations, community groups and all levels of government. Through our comprehensive consultation and subsequent discussions, stakeholders shared their priorities, challenges and ideas for strengthening the Territory workforce. I thank all those who contributed their time, expertise and lived experience.

The issues raised through consultation, including workforce shortages, skills mismatches, attraction and retention challenges, pathways for local Territorians, and the need for better coordination across systems, while also highlighting the 'can-do' attitude of Territorians and their willingness to step into new roles and 'give it a go', have shaped this Strategy. It responds directly to stakeholder concerns and provides a shared platform for action across government, industry and the community.

No single organisation or sector can address workforce challenges alone. This Strategy sets out how we will work together, aligning policy, investment and effort, to support employers, create meaningful pathways into jobs, and ensure Territorians have the skills and opportunities to participate in a changing economy.

The Building a Bigger, Better Workforce Strategy is not a static document. It is a living framework that will continue to evolve as we listen, learn and adapt. Through ongoing collaboration and shared responsibility, we can build a workforce that supports sustainable growth, economic diversification and strong communities across the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory is well positioned to capitalise on emerging opportunities, with economic growth, population growth, technological innovation and major project investment presenting a unique opportunity to strengthen workforce capability, productivity and prosperity.

I look forward to working with our partners to deliver on this Strategy and to realise the collective vision it sets out for the Territory's workforce.



The Hon Robyn Cahill OAM MLA
Minister for Workforce Development
Northern Territory Government


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Building a bigger, better workforce

The Building a Bigger, Better Workforce: Northern Territory Workforce Development Strategy 2026–2036 sets out a practical approach to grow the Territory's workforce, build capability and strengthen the conditions that support participation, mobility and productivity across the Northern Territory.



Vision: An inclusive workforce that meets industry demand, supports growth and delivers for Territorians.

The Northern Territory is entering a dynamic decade.

A significant pipeline of projects in resources, infrastructure, defence and energy is expected to drive strong demand for workers across the Territory. At the same time, population growth is increasing demand for the services that underpin health, liveability and community life in our towns, regional centres and cities. Even without these major projects, employment in the Territory is already forecast to grow by more than 1.6% annually over the next decade, alongside a national increase of 1.3%[1] or nearly two million jobs.

This growth is being reshaped by rapid advances in technology. Digital systems and artificial intelligence are changing how work is performed across all industries, influencing the types of jobs required, the skills needed and how work is organised.

Together, these forces present a clear challenge and a significant opportunity.

The Northern Territory's economic future depends on its ability to mobilise a workforce at scale and speed. Without targeted action, the Territory will need to grow and develop its workforce to ensure the right skills are available in the right place at the right time.

Securing more workers and strengthening skills is crucial to realising the promise of the Territory's abundant resources, its proximity to fast-growing trading partners, and its capacity to deliver the services and lifestyle that support a growing population.

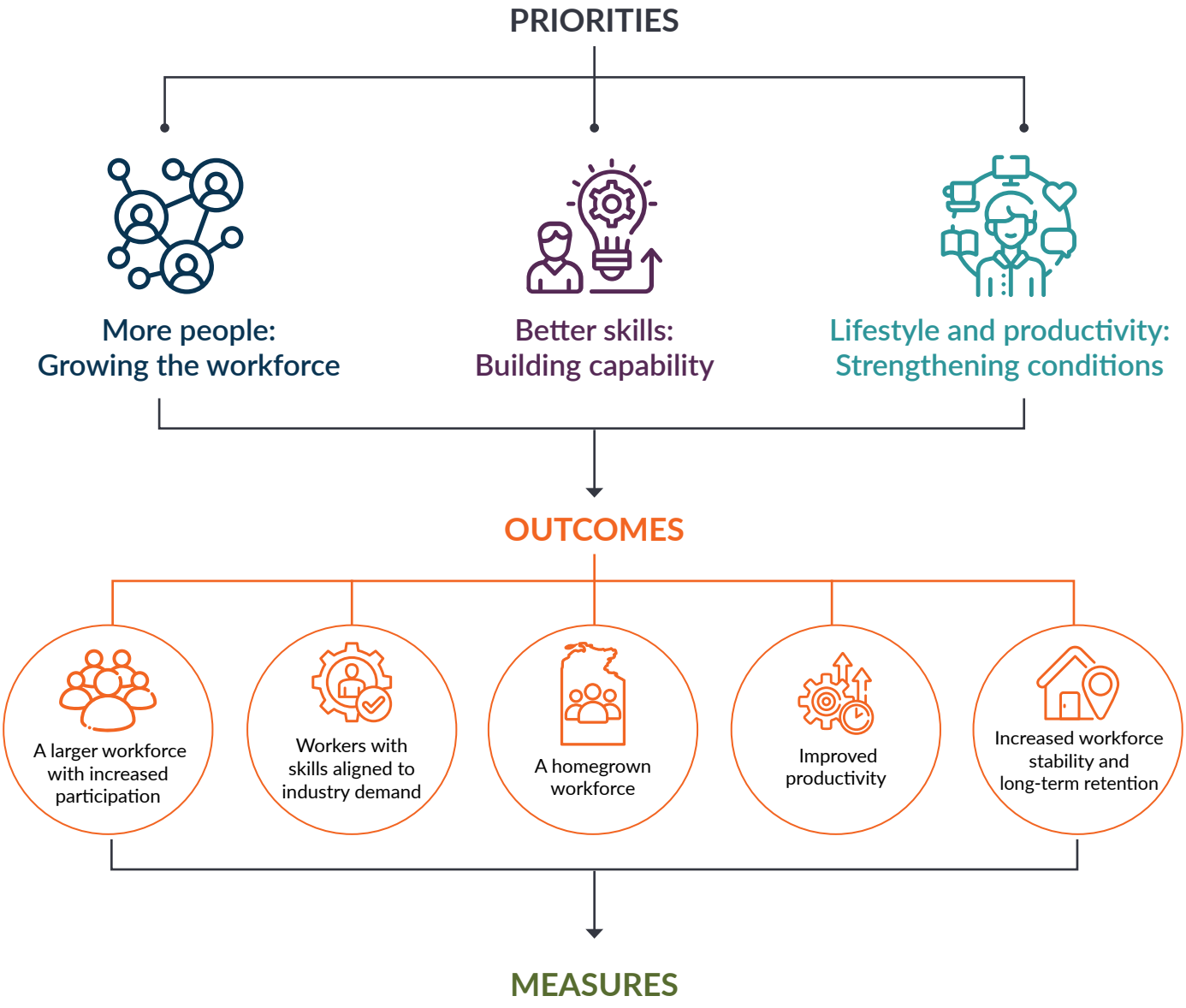
At the same time, the changing shape of work creates an opportunity to lift productivity, adopt new ways of working and build a workforce that is more adaptable and resilient to change. Realising this opportunity requires the right settings and incentives, with employment pathways that are accessible, culturally appropriate and aligned to community and economic priorities.

The Building a Bigger, Better Workforce: Northern Territory Workforce Development Strategy 2026–2036 (the Strategy) sets out a practical approach to grow the Territory's workforce, build capability and strengthen the conditions that support participation, mobility and productivity across the Northern Territory.

1. Victoria University Employment Forecasting Model, Victoria University, 2026

Securing talent, growing capability and unlocking productivity

A thriving workforce for today's jobs and tomorrow's opportunity is the central vision of the first whole-of-Territory Workforce Development Strategy and aligns with the Rebuilding the Economy: NT Economic Strategy 2025-2028.



- Growth in the Territory's population
- Improved employment outcomes
- Improved migration outcomes
- Improved education and training outcomes
- Improved enabling workforce conditions
- Reduced licensing and regulatory processing times
- Business-reported productivity improvements

Securing more workers and strengthening skills is crucial to realising the promise of the Territory's abundant resources, its proximity to fast-growing trading partners, and its capacity to deliver the services and lifestyle that support a growing population.




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The Northern Territory's outlook

The Territory economy is thriving, driving sustained demand for workers across all industries. Forecasts predict economic growth at an average of 3.2% per annum to 2028–29[2]. The Territory is projected to create over 29,000 new jobs over the next 10 years[3], equating to an annual growth of around 1.6%,[3] driven by resources, energy, defence and infrastructure sectors, alongside increasing demand for essential services. In addition, the Territory will also need to replace almost 44,000 workers over the same period due to retirement and other workforce exits.

Further potential is on the Territory's doorstep, with a pipeline of major projects across the resources, energy, defence, and infrastructure sectors, alongside increasing demand for essential services. Commitment to major projects and the timing is largely externally determined and will have a measurable impact on workforce demand and peaks, Territory wide.

As at mid-2026, around 150,000 people are employed in the Northern Territory, representing approximately 1%[4] of Australia's total workforce. The Territory's participation rate of around 73.4% is well above the national average, while unemployment remains relatively low at 4.7%[4].

Key characteristics and indicators of the NT local labour force June 2026

Participation rate	Unemployment rate	Underemployment rate	Underutilisation rate
73.4%	4.7%	4.6%	9.3%
The Territory is already maximising its available workforce	Meeting new workforce demand will require multiple sources of workforce supply	Workforce capacity is close to fully utilised	Some latent capacity exists

These key characteristics and indicators reflect a tight labour market with limited spare capacity to respond to additional demand.



2. Department of Treasury and Finance, 2025–26 Budget Paper 2 – Budget Strategy and Outlook
3. Victoria University Employment Forecasting Model, Victoria University, 2026
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force Australia, June 2026



The Northern Territory workforce is characterised by a diverse and geographically dispersed population, supporting an economy underpinned by mineral and energy resources, primary production, tourism, defence, and the public sector.

The Northern Territory workforce is characterised by a diverse and geographically dispersed population, supporting an economy underpinned by mineral and energy resources, primary production, tourism, defence, and the public sector. Major employing industries include mining and energy, construction, public administration and defence, health and social services, education, tourism, and agriculture.

The labour market is dynamic, with high-levels of interstate mobility. Many workers move to and from the Territory for short-term employment opportunities, particularly in construction, resources, and major infrastructure projects. Technological changes are also transforming how work is done across all industries. While these dynamics support economic activity, innovation and flexibility, they also create opportunities to strengthen the Territory's workforce. These include building skills across emerging and key trades and professions, strengthening the attraction and retention of workers in regional and remote areas, and growing a stable, locally based workforce alongside fly-in fly-out arrangements.

The Northern Territory's economy is strongly place-based, creating varying workforce demand pressures across the Territory. Greater Darwin remains the main growth centre with regional centres and remote communities playing a key role, at times at a slower pace.



Workforce supply

Northern Territory's population is just over 265,000 people, and while it is growing, workforce demand is growing faster than population growth.

Key characteristics and indicators show the local labour market is highly utilised, with strong participation and very low unemployment, leaving limited spare capacity to meet growing demand. Meeting future workforce demand will require both local workforce development and additional workforce supply. Additional workforce supply will be required through migration, increased participation, improved retention and productivity.

Migration plays a critical role in shaping workforce supply but also highlights a key structural challenge.

The Northern Territory consistently records net interstate migration losses (more people leaving than arriving), which reduces the local workforce base.

At the same time, overseas migration partly offsets these losses, contributing each year to population growth.

Workforce mobility is a defining feature of the NT labour market. A significant share of workers:

- move to the Territory for short-term opportunities
- work in fly-in fly-out (FIFO) or project-based roles
- leave after relatively short periods.

Mobility supports project delivery, and creates opportunities to strengthen workforce continuity and grow the locally based workforce.

The Northern Territory's participation rates are well above the national average, signalling that available workforce is already maximised and has little capacity to draw more people in without clear pathways, incentives and intervention.

Productivity improvements will help to meet growing demand by understanding future skill needs, adopting new technologies and ways of working, and improving how work is organised across industries.

Workforce outcomes are also shaped by broader conditions. Housing, cost of living, connectivity, childcare and essential services all affect whether people can move to the Territory, take up work and stay. Licensing, screening and approval processes also affect how quickly businesses can hire workers.

Working together across governments, employers, industry, education and training providers, and community organisations is essential to deliver coordinated, long-term outcomes.



The Northern Territory's participation rates are well above the national average, signalling that high participation means additional workforce growth will increasingly depend on new pathways, attraction and retention initiatives.







Key priorities

Priority 1
More people: Growing the workforce

Increase the number of people participating in the Territory workforce by attracting workers, improving workforce participation, and supporting migration aligned to workforce demand. This includes unlocking participation from underrepresented groups, strengthening pathways into employment and supporting local businesses.

Why this is a priority

Meeting future workforce demand requires a coordinated approach that increases workforce participation, develops local talent pipelines, and attracts skilled workers from across Australia and overseas. Expanding opportunities for underrepresented groups to participate in the workforce, alongside targeted attraction initiatives, will help ensure the Territory has the workforce needed to support economic growth.

Migrant workers remain an important component of the workforce, with around 30% of employed Territorians born in countries where English is not the main language. Strengthening migration pathways aligned to workforce needs will continue to play a key role in addressing shortages.

Workforce availability also varies across the Territory, with regional and remote communities facing particular challenges in attracting and retaining skilled workers. Supporting Territory businesses to attract, retain and develop local workers, particularly in regional and remote areas, will be critical to building a sustainable workforce and creating long-term employment opportunities. Addressing barriers to participation and improving access to employment opportunities in these areas will also be essential to strengthening local workforce capacity.

The Territory competes nationally and internationally for talent. Effective strategies must attract and retain new workers in the workforce by promoting the unique benefits of Territory living including diverse career opportunities, a high quality of life, and the Territory's iconic natural environment.

Our focus

	INITIATIVE	ACTION
1.1	**Promote the Territory as a great place to work, live, study and invest**	Deliver targeted, data driven campaigns to promote the Territory as a great place to work, live, study and invest.
		Improve digital platforms connecting workers to Territory job opportunities and information.
		Explore incentives to attract workers with core skills in key occupations.
1.2	**Advocate for migration settings that reflect the Territory's needs**	Work with the Australian Government to secure migration settings that support Territory workforce priorities.
		Strengthen awareness and uptake of migration pathways among employers and prospective migrants.
		Improve pathways for skilled migrants to settle, participate, and remain in the Territory long term.
1.3	**Support regional employment and workforce**	Build sustainable local workforces in regional and remote locations.
		Work with education providers, communities, industry and employers to expand place-based employment and training initiatives that increase participation in local jobs.
1.4	**Grow workforce participation**	Develop re-entry pathways that help experienced workers reconnect with the labour market.
		Increase workforce participation by reducing barriers to employment and supporting underrepresented cohorts into work.
1.5	**Plan for the future**	Update priority sector list annually to reflect changing workforce demand.
		Map projected workforce demand against timing of major projects and workforce capacity.
		Recalibrate workforce planning and forecasting in response to advances in technology including Artificial Intelligence.



Priority 2
Better skills: Building capability

Ensure the workforce has the skills required by industry by aligning education and training to real jobs, expanding apprenticeships and traineeships, and strengthening school-to-work pathways. This supports career mobility and alignment between people and career opportunity.

Why this is a priority

Demand for skilled workers is growing across the Territory, and stronger alignment between training and jobs will help address skills shortages. Strengthening the connection between education, training and industry ensures people develop relevant skills and are better prepared for employment opportunities.

Capability development begins in school and continues through clear, accessible pathways into further education, training and employment. Ensuring Territorians are aware of local career opportunities and can see clear pathways into jobs will help build a strong future workforce. Strengthening school-to-work transitions, alongside expanding apprenticeships, traineeships and higher education offerings, supports smoother entry into the workforce and helps people make informed career choices.

As industries evolve, lifelong learning is increasingly important. Workers require flexible, industry-aligned training to remain job-ready.

Emerging sectors and new ways of working are creating changing skill needs across the economy. Building capability requires a more agile, industry-led skills system that can adapt to these changes and provide accessible training options.

Ensuring Territorians are aware of local career opportunities and can see clear pathways into jobs will help build a strong future workforce.

Our focus

	INITIATIVE	ACTION
2.1	**Align skills investment with workforce need**	Support innovative, flexible and place-based training models that improve access and participation.
		Direct training investment toward workforce priorities, emerging industries and future skills needs.
2.2	**Strengthen early career pathways**	Strengthen awareness of Territory careers through coordinated school, industry and community engagement.
		Increase opportunities for work-integrated learning, industry placements and career exposure in secondary schools.
2.3	**Grow apprenticeships and traineeships**	Increase apprenticeship and traineeship commencements and completions in priority industries.
		Strengthen employer and education provider partnerships to improve retention and completion outcomes.
		Expand local training capacity, including accredited trainers in regional and remote locations.
2.4	**Promote higher education offerings**	Align higher education offerings with current and future workforce demand.
		Improve graduate attraction and retention outcomes in the Territory.
2.5	**Support workforce progression and mobility**	Expand targeted upskilling and reskilling opportunities that enable workers to progress into higher-skilled or new roles.
		Improve skills accreditation and recognition offerings for Territory workers.



Priority 3
Lifestyle and productivity: Strengthening conditions

Strengthen the conditions that enable people to live and work in the Territory, while improving productivity. This includes addressing barriers such as housing, cost of living and connectivity, supporting better ways of working through technology and improved regulation and licensing.

Why this is a priority

The Northern Territory's workforce challenges are not driven by a lack of jobs, but by opportunities to strengthen workforce supply, participation and retention. Barriers such as housing availability, cost of living, connectivity and complex processes can impede people's ability to enter, remain and move within the workforce, particularly in regional and remote areas where demand is greatest.

Addressing these conditions is a key element to workforce performance and economic delivery. Without action, efforts to attract workers and build skills will continue to be constrained by broader system barriers.

Retention is a key opportunity. While the Territory attracts workers, there is an opportunity to encourage more workers to stay longer term. Strengthening liveability through housing, infrastructure and services will help build a more stable and experienced workforce, increase workforce stability and long-term retention.

Improving productivity is also essential. With a small, highly utilised labour market, the Territory cannot rely on workforce growth alone. Harnessing technological advances and scaling new ways of working to lift productivity and streamlining regulation will allow businesses and workers to deliver more with the resources available.

Strengthening liveability through housing, infrastructure and services will help build a more stable and experienced workforce, increase workforce stability and long-term retention.

Our focus

	INITIATIVE	ACTION
3.1	Improve workforce retention and stability	Work with community organisations and industry to strengthen community connections and settlement support that encourage workers and families to build long-term futures in the Territory.
		Support employers to develop workforce practices that improve attraction, retention and career development.
		Work with employers to transition suitable FIFO roles to locally based employment opportunities.
3.2	Create the conditions for workforce growth	Support liveability outcomes that strengthen the Territory's competitiveness for workers and families.
		Strengthen the Territory's aviation connectivity, choice and competition to improve access to family and friends.
		Advocate for and support the enabling infrastructure, services and housing required to attract and retain workers.
		Improve access to health and education across the Territory.
3.3	Harness technology and unlock productivity	Reduce unnecessary barriers through streamlined licensing, accreditation and regulatory processes.
		Support businesses and workers to adopt technology, Artificial Intelligence and new ways of working that improve productivity.
		Monitor impact of Artificial Intelligence on workforce to unlock opportunities and harness aligned skills sets.
3.4	Strengthen workforce intelligence and coordination	Publish workforce and labour market insights and forecasts to guide investment and policy decisions.

Delivering the strategy and measuring performance

The Northern Territory is well positioned to capitalise on strong economic growth, significant investment and emerging opportunities. As the Territory continues to expand, there is an increasing need to strengthen the alignment between workforce supply and demand to ensure businesses, industries and communities can fully realise these opportunities.

The Strategy will be delivered through partnerships between government, industry, employers, education and training providers, and community organisations. Recognising that workforce development is a shared responsibility, stakeholders will work together to address workforce challenges and maximise the benefits of economic growth for Territorians, businesses and communities.

Measures will be used to track workforce growth, skills alignment and productivity outcomes across its three priorities—growing the workforce, building skills, and strengthening conditions.

These measures provide a clear view of workforce performance, support evidence-based decisions, and ensure actions remain targeted to meet the Territory's workforce and economic needs.

The Northern Territory Government is committed to publishing performance against these measures to support transparency and business confidence.

Measures:

- growth in the Territory's population
- improved employment outcomes
- improved migration outcomes
- improved education and training outcomes
- improved enabling workforce conditions
- reduced licensing and regulatory processing times
- business-reported productivity improvements

Recognising that workforce development is a shared responsibility, stakeholders will work together to address workforce challenges and maximise the benefits of economic growth for Territorians, businesses and communities.




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