

Membership Toolkit

Organisational Allyship

To make change for a more just and equitable society, non-Indigenous allies are needed to help challenge the racist systems and policies that adversely affect the experiences of First Nations Peoples. Organisations are uniquely positioned to innovate their internal systems and policies to ensure inclusion, cultural safety, and the promotion of First Nations rights.

“An ally is someone who promotes diversity and inclusion through their own actions.” [i]

Being an organisational ally means working with First Nations Peoples- either internally through engagement with First Nations employees, or externally through community consultation- to critically assess whether your systems, policies, and procedures align with models of equity and inclusion.

How Can Organisations Engage in Allyship?

Centre Indigenous Voices

It is important that any policies, procedures, programs, or strategies relating to First Nations cultures, languages and peoples, are led and informed by First Nations perspectives. This means a thorough process of engagement, review, and feedback where a variety of First Nations stakeholders are consulted. Stakeholders could include local community, employees, clients, and partnering organisations.

Develop Principles

Work with First Nations People in your organisation, where possible, to develop a set of principles that inform how you engage with your local Aboriginal community. If it is not possible to seek advice from First Nations Peoples, you need to research thoroughly about the appropriate process.

Reflect on First Nations Employment and Retention

To ensure your organisation is a place where First Nations Peoples want to work and grow their career, it is crucial to reflect on how your organisation supports First Nations Peoples in the workplace.

Some questions to ask:

1. Are all non-Indigenous staff participating in cultural competency training?
2. Do you have a reporting system for incidents of racism?
3. Is there First Nations leadership in your organisation?
4. Does your organisation celebrate First Nations cultures?
5. Does your organisation understand and address identity strain?

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Identity Strain

The term 'Identity Strain' was coined by a research team from the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research. It refers to "the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace". [ii] In other words, First Nations Peoples feel they must adjust aspects of their cultural identity to fit in at the workplace.

Examples of Identity Strain

A First Nations Person being asked not to be outspoken on Indigenous political issues.

A First Nations Person feeling pressure to work harder to prove themselves as competent because they are Indigenous.

Workplace obligations interfering with cultural beliefs around Country, family, and kinship ties.

Developing a Meaningful RAP

A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is a thorough and ongoing way to demonstrate organisational commitment to allyship. RAPs require meaningful structural change within your organisation- they are not a tick-box exercise.

Organisational learning takes continual time, commitment, and reflection. There are four RAP types: Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate, each designed to suit organisations at different stages of their reconciliation journey. These levels should not be viewed as a badge to display. Each RAP level takes years of learning and adjusting and can regress if diligence is lost.

When Designing Your RAP:

- **Dedicate adequate resources** to ensure a **thorough and meaningful design process**.
- Ensure each RAP action translates to a **practical and positive impact** in your **local Aboriginal community**.
- Your RAP should **benefit First Nations employees** and not cause extra strain. It should be **guided by First Nations perspectives**, but the work needs to be done by everyone.

[i] Ian Wishart, "How to be an ally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples", The Fred Hollows Foundation, October 21, 2022, <https://www.hollows.org/latest-news/how-to-be-an-ally/>.

[ii] Nareen Young & Mark Ragg, "10 ways employers can include First Nations people", The Conversation, November 17, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/10-ways-employers-can-include-indigenous-australians-149741>