

Email Submission from: Angela Bennet (Cahoots)

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Thank you for requesting feedback on this important strategy.

Yes, I agree the main ideas are right. I don't believe I need to comment on language used, as I'm not an Aboriginal person and don't feel I have the right to dictate another person's preferences for describing their own identity. Happy to use the language preferred by each individual or the community as a whole.

I do see one glaring gap in the solutions put forth in the discussion paper. Section 6, Building cultural Understanding and Respect, contains a list of key ideas that speak to the unconscious bias, lack of awareness, and outright racism that inhibit our ability to build understanding and respect between cultures. Yet the ideas presented to combat these problems fall unequally on the shoulders of Aboriginal individuals. Participating in recreation and community, sharing history and culture in schools, or being showcased in advertising or positive stories promoted by governments – these are all solutions that rely on individual people to be ambassadors for their community while allowing non-Aboriginal people to passively absorb a “new normal” until they are gently coaxed from their unconscious bias or outright racism by exposure to Aboriginal people who are behaving in ways that fit a non-Aboriginal persons expectations.

Racism and unconscious bias need to be challenged directly. In my direct experience, I've known people who would not consider themselves racist but were horrified to discover their thinking was deeply affected by bias they hadn't acknowledged. Simply having their ideas challenged shifted them to realise that they were expressing racist ideas, not through malice but through unexamined thinking.

In order to Build Cultural Understanding and Respect, I would like to see the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy include elements that challenge non-Aboriginal people to examine their intrinsic bias. Most adults in WA know little about First Nation people's heritage, lives, experiences, or communities.

Statistics tell us that when it comes to hiring, diverse hires will only stay in workplaces where they're contribution is welcome and the atmosphere is inclusive. If the government allows the burden of building cultural understanding and respect to fall fully on Aboriginal people, we have not just implemented an inequitable solution,

we have also set up our businesses and organisations for failure because we have not fully prepared them for the inclusive environment needed to keep diverse hires on the team.

In short, I highly recommend that inclusion or cultural competence training be made available through the strategy in order to prepare the Australian workforce for a more inclusive hiring environment, to actively reduce tensions and misunderstandings that disrupt the building cultural respect, share the burden for implementing change more equally between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and to ensure that Aboriginal people and organisations are supported by structures that directly challenge racially biased thinking.

Happy to discuss further if you'd like to get in touch.

Kind Regards,

Angela

