

Aboriginal Advisory Cultural Strategy

Introduction

The basis of this discussion is to outline the capacity to break ground and to foster and nurture changemakers and innovators; place visionaries in spaces and places where constraint's and conformity are the norm.

It will also be written with mostly non-Academic terminology, but a narrative style in order for a wider audience to be reached and comprehend in simple terms some of the more complex issues.

If the McGowan Governmental aspirations are to engage and include local Aboriginal communities within the state, to activate and drive change; as well as to improve the states appalling performances in the economic, health, social & emotional wellbeing spaces. It first needs to have open and honest conversation with those stakeholders, who have been impacted most by change and dispossession.

This discussion is not about holding a witch-hunt, or placing blame on consecutive Permanent Governments of the day; but opening up some of those wounds and finding some real cures, as well as proven evidence-based solutions.

Aboriginal Australians the country wide, actually have already achieved solutions, and aspire to sharing and developing those progressions and best practices, in their small corners of their worlds.

Social and economic inclusion is an easy-fix, by creating collaborative projects that use a process of not having to re-invent the wheel, but to build on some tried and true ingredients for success.

Two streams of economic development for Aboriginal Australians are those of which there are no competitors, therefore have no real threat of losing customers. They are and have been both untapped and under-resourced by consecutive Permanent Governments due to small-minded bureaucrats and petty gatekeepers.

- The Cultural Tourism Industry
- The Aboriginal Arts Industry

The key to accessing these milestones and community-based projects and innovative programs is access to a myriad of groups, organisations and individuals that are privy to and have access to those change-makers and visionaries that are more than willing to develop shared approaches and wrap-around services provisions that keep the goals in the front of not only their minds but to some already implemented programs and strategies.

Each Permanent Government, Liberal or Labour have continued to imbue the same tired individuals and out-of-touch gatekeepers; in their continued Aboriginal Advisory roles. Even though, these individuals have not and do not have any idea about what is going on in the local grass-roots communities.

Simply put, current advisors are simply out of touch with the local community and have no idea what the issues being discussed or talked about are, and or even considered at local levels.



Miranda Farmer active change-maker and community volunteer...



The strategy identifies six key areas:

• **Putting culture at the centre;**

In order to implement a strategy as bold as this, you need to first understand what that statement might look like at community levels.

Cultures from most Aboriginal community's perspectives are about values. Some of those values are as follows, to name just a few: -

- i. Cultural protocols – whatever they may look like for each of the six major regions across the state of WA.
 - a. The Southwest – Noongar
 - b. The Goldfields – Wongatha
 - c. The Murchison – Yamatji
 - d. The Gascoyne – Bardimia
 - e. The Pilbara – Martu
 - f. The Kimberley – Gidja
- ii. Respect
- iii. Integrity
- iv. Equity
- v. Accountability
- vi. Decisiveness
- vii. Strength
- viii. Teamwork/Community

The list could go on and on; and have in my lifetime seen first-hand consecutive Permanent Governments shred cultural values with justifications of abiding by party policies.

The reason I'm adding my own personal experiences and evidence based on those experiences is because, like the rest of Aboriginal Australians – “we've heard it all before”, in a million different jargonistic languages.

• **Bringing decisions closer to communities;**

Engagement is a tricky prospect; in that for those aforementioned regional consultations, it's about speaking to the right organisations and individuals.

There have in the past decades, been an interesting changing of the guards; that are about the generational losses, both young and old. And how they continue to impact the issues that some of these communities' concerns revolve around.

For example, Port Hedland and the surrounding communities have been hit hard by the levels of Youth Suicide. This has been an issue that the youth in the region, has taken it upon themselves to set up some of the stronger and more influential community's and lobby groups. And the elders in this region are listening, and encouraging local councils to do so as well.

- **Enabling Aboriginal-led solutions;**

I have in my professional journey's bore witness to some incredible Aboriginal-led solutions, which have had the missile of micro-management destroying both motivations and passions.

We hear all too often the "white is right" motto is of the ruling class; and that is senior policy-making roles often require cross-cultural awareness training as performance indicators.

Those decision-making roles and individuals repeatedly throw up the bound by policy speech; but for the most part, have worked to disprove and dispel these best-practices and solutions; due to the lack of not knowing any other reasoning, because they couldn't develop them and are threatened and led by envy and poor performances in their own spaces.

In essence, Aboriginal-led solutions are canned by bodies of strategic & administrative ineptitude non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal individuals that have spent their entire professional careers honing the art of looking as if they are doing something; when in actual fact are expert in doing the opposite 'Nothing'.

I believe that we've all meet with these sorts of individuals & organisations; none of which could make it in the commercial industry & world, so comfortably reside in the world of Government's complacent cesspools and bureaucratic wastelands. For the wider mainstream Government Departments and Not-for-profit Organisations, the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio is popular, because of the continued state of there being no real accountability or target based tracking.

- **Investing more in preventative and early-intervention initiatives;**

Let's use "Aboriginal Health" as a topic that I've had a great deal to do with and involvement in; as a test-case to point out some of the cons.

Then we'll move to some of the Aboriginal-led solutions, which are still not being adhered to implemented or supported; even though they've a proven track record of success.

There is an epidemic that is costing this Government and many generations into the future Governments billions and possibly trillions of tax-payers dollars. The title FASD – Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

The male prisons in WA hold 89% Aboriginal Australian; the female, not far behind in 69% Aboriginal Australians. The juvenile detentions centres have 92% Aboriginal Australians in WA.

The corrections department engaged the country's foremost expert with a specialised PhD in FASD, Dr Robyn Williams (Noongar) in an Aboriginal-led program to test and give percentages of inmates in the Juvenile centres alone; the results in collaborations with Telethon Kids Institute was 93% of these inmates were on the Spectrum.

In essence this current Government and all those previous Permanent Governments have systematically criminalised Aboriginal Youth with this particular disability in Western Australia.

The Aboriginal-led solution and recommendations given by Noongar Dr Robyn Williams were presented to and discussed at the highest levels with the then Health Minister, Ken Wyatt.

None of those well-researched and documented solutions or recommendations was taken on board; because, again the policy positions on incarcerations and health, do not communicate with each other. They operate as all of Government do across the board, in their own miniscule small-minded silos.

Dr Robyn Williams received a very small scholarship from the chosen University – to complete the study and research questionnaire on Noongar country.

Dr Williams engaged and had community supporters and Child Protection's relative foster-carers, such as myself and husband. Talked with and connected with many hundred possibly thousands of Noongar families across the width and breadth of Noongar country voluntarily over a nine-year period.

To search for answers, solutions and some spaces and places for preventative programs and early-interventions, or something similar to piggy-back on, in some way shape or form, sadly to no avail.

The reasons again “POLICY”, or lack of funding or programs and service providers that may actually be interested in this epidemic.

This particular strategy will be the greatest challenge on your little wish-list; due to the fact that this still hasn't been given the dire attention and support that it so desperately needs.

I won't even elaborate on renal failure and mental health issues that are not simply Aboriginal Health issues anymore.

A well-known and internationally renowned Aboriginal Musician - RIP, was actually an **Aboriginal Millionaire** and performed for HRH Queen Elizabeth. Suffering from one of the preventable diseases like renal failure, wasn't even afforded the option of a 'kidney transplant', in a First-World's countries healthcare system .

So let's take good long look, at aspirations of early-interventions and call out some examples, as I have just done. Let's begin as a whole community to roll out some of these conversations around duty-of-care and what that might look like initially.

- **Boosting economic opportunities; and**

I have been a part of the Aboriginal Arts and Cultural tourism industries in support of my Husband and Son's professional journey's and artisans' practices for more than two decades.

There has in this space been little or no help, assistance or resources for Noongar Aboriginal Arts practitioners within Government departments or agencies other than 'Artsource' and the miniscule amounts of funding to do so (my Husband & Son have never been in receipt of any grants or funding from the state or federal agencies e.g. Australia Council).

In my family's experience, the success has been sought out and found in the private commercial and resources sectors; as well as the education and niche-markets/weekend-markets sectors.

Government don't have a clue about economic opportunities; because, again they simply don't have the most successful people in those advisory roles.

In my professional opinion, Government need to employ successful consultants and individuals with lengthy experience and expertise in their chosen field that bring forward fresh and new ideas and innovatively conceptual approaches.

What little resources have been given over to the Arts and Cultural tourism sectors has only been drip-feed to the northern parts of the state and non-whatsoever in the southwest, where the majority of commercial opportunities are. The stats to prove this, (IVAIS) are on the link attached.

<https://www.arts.gov.au/documents/2018-19-funding-recipients-indigenous-visual-arts-industry-support-ivais-program>

I, my Husband and other members of WAITOC were invited by Maori Tourism to Rotorua NZ, in 2016.

And saw first-hand, how resources and infrastructure is properly capacity-built and supported by more than Government but mainstream & private industry and community as well. The key is to include all stakeholders and stress their importance, and make them all feel that this is happening as well.

A senior non-Aboriginal policy advisor and administrator for the MRA informed myself and my husband of our own community gate-keepers that have worked to hinder my husbands and many like his Aboriginal Arts practitioners in favour of their own gains and nepotistic ulterior motives.

These advisors have moved over to Development WA, to continue to do much of the same – different name, same stagnant staff.

Development WA is the MRA's replacement body that will continue to limit innovators and creators that have the potential to improve the business-as-usual lacklustre cultures within these Government departments that are stagnant and not fluid enough to grow and move with the ever-changing tides that are coming, throughout this decade and beyond.

Put plain and simple; there is too much 'old rot' at the bottom of your ship that will eventually sink the real possibilities and opportunities you might have had for change, growth and real activations in this space.

Boosting economic opportunities, within the Noongar community is already happening; and has been happening for decades, with or without the miniscule Government tokenistic handouts.

What is required by Permanent Government at this convergence, are regulatory bodies and organisations that regulate industry-led guidelines. Aboriginal tour operators should be given the same legal support that their mainstream counterparts do.

The **Aboriginal Arts industry** in this country is estimated to be worth a whopping 500 Million annually (these figures are considered to be conservative); that is still the only industry in the country not regulated, shamefully within industry standards.

- **Building cultural understanding and respect.**

In essence ‘cultural understanding and respect’ is where reciprocity should reside at all times. This is a core strategy that should adhere to the going-both-ways positions that all Permanent Governments continue to peddle out during elections.

Will this or any other Government actually listen to us – the local Aboriginal communities, or themselves and the empty rhetoric and bile they continue to exude from their bureaucratic-based Aboriginal Affairs offices and agencies?

There is not a community on the planet that does not know what respect or empathy is or means in practice.

The problems arise when toxic perspectives of individuals and agencies come into the discussion. When your perspective is that of privilege the implementation or practice is always very different, from one community to the next.

Aboriginal Australians are educated and are painfully aware that “White Australian Privilege” has inherited economic wealth from our community’s dispossession, ill-health and social demise. We refer to it regularly as akin to the “Grand-Narrative” that allowed six million Jews be placed in gas chambers.

This having been stated, our community continues to be deprived of building a commercial base all its own away from the ‘welfare state’ and its associated industries.

An example might be, that Australia was at War with Vietnam 50 years ago; and in most capital cities the country over, and you are able to visit a Vietnamese restaurant. The frontier Wars in this country were more than two centuries ago, and we have still not been afforded those same opportunities the Vietnamese and or other diverse communities enjoy.

These analogies are a way in which I’m attempting to communicate in the simplest possible forms; our deepest desires, as citizens of this country.

We “Aboriginal Australians”, in Perth Western Australia, want to have the ability to work, and build our own commercial bases and wealth, for future generations to not merely survive, but to also thrive, the same as other diverse communities have.

Sadly, my confirmed pessimism in 2020, is derived from badly planned programs and strategies, that have band-aide packaging all over them, and will miss the mark, due to the Aboriginal-Advisory’s gatekeeping and inherited ‘lateral-violence’ culture monitoring and excluding this response/paper from the pile.

But if the McGowan Government is genuinely interested in the achieving these & many more strategies; I’d be happy to offer my consultative services throughout this transitional process.

Miranda Farmer, 2020. ©

‘Environmental Scientist’ and

‘Respected Noongar Community Member’ and ‘Entrepreneur’

Inaugural Board Member of “Activate Perth” –

<https://www.activateperth.com.au/news/2019/7/5/naidoc-week-throw-back>