



TOOLKIT: UNDERSTANDING THE DIVERSITY OF VOICES TO INFORM RECONCILIATION

ACTION

A resource for non-Aboriginal people to understand the diversity of voices within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how non-Aboriginal people's actions should be informed by these voices.

This toolkit was developed from messages presented and discussed at the Reconciliation Victoria Forum on October 26, 2019. The forum focussed on unpacking what recent developments (ie Treaty, Statement of the Heart and Self-Determination) mean in the midst of ongoing injustice, what they mean for reconciliation work in Victoria, how we define reconciliation and create systemic change.

HIGHLIGHTS

Defining Reconciliation – *more info on [Reconciliation Victoria website](#)*

Reconciliation Victoria's definition of reconciliation is about progressing and achieving five key dimensions - based on Reconciliation Australia's State of Reconciliation Report (2016) – with a few tweaks. The 5 dimensions are inter-related action must be taken across all areas:

- **Overcoming racism and understanding white privilege and power relations**
- **Achieving equitable outcomes in justice, health, education and employment between Aboriginal and other Victorians**
- **Developing a new State-wide identity:** A Victoria where the sovereignty of Aboriginal people is recognised by all; a Victoria where the significance of self-determination is not only recognized, but understood and valued; and a Victoria where we all have an opportunity to connect with a shared sense of place.
- **Government, corporate and community accountability**
- **Addressing historical injustice:** this is about truth-telling and fully implementing the recommendations of countless Royal Commissions and Reports and truthful community narratives of local history - such as memorials to frontier wars, place names reflecting shared history and local Aboriginal language.

Overview of Action You Can Take:

- **Start discussions with family and friends.** You have the power to influence their relationship with First Nations people and their engagement with reconciliation. Don't be afraid to start those conversations at home, at work and in your local schools and early years centres.
- **Educate yourself.** Having to share culture and prove culture to non-Aboriginal people is exhausting, and that burden should not continue to fall on Aboriginal people. We live in an age where resources to learn and teach ourselves are at our fingertips whenever we need them. Take the initiative to look into these resources for yourself instead of relying on someone else to teach you everything.

- **Hold those in power to account.** Put pressure on local MP's to have conversations and to drive change. Those in power must be held to account for the decisions they make. Use your voice to keep decision-makers accountable to the people they make decisions for.
- **Empower Aboriginal self-determination.** Aboriginal people should always be at the forefront of decision-making about their own people. Let them drive the conversation about their own issues, and never speak on their behalf. If you can add or offer any skills that can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to hold their own power and drive it, speak to them, tell them what you can offer to assist in their work.

Other Key Ideas Highlighted to Keep in Mind:

- Reconciliation activities function within a structure that is dominated by colonial power, and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience the impact of that power.
 - Understand that when an issue is something for non-Aboriginal people to engage with, you will be called to action and asked to show your support. Sometimes issues are internal business and it is not the place of non-Aboriginal people to comment or insert themselves.
 - Aboriginal people are not one homogenous group, they are a diverse group of clans and nations with different cultures and practices. They aren't going to agree on everything.
 - You will be confronted by ugly truths, but it is important to live with those truths and continue to learn. There is a lack of willingness to unpack the identity of this nation because of injustice, own that history no matter how uncomfortable.
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OTHER KEY MESSAGES/THOUGHTS FROM OUR GUEST SPEAKERS

- Our Constitution leaves Aboriginal people invisible. What we need are trusted allies to work with us to address fears, hold government accountable and work with us in the driving seat
- Past Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander representative bodies have been shut down or defunded by government every time – formal voice structures have been extinguished.
- Fundamentally we are fighting for equity - many recommendations and reports have been completed on how to change this, all evidence suggests when our people lead and govern it is sustainable.
- Reconciliation and your role – fundamentally Aboriginal business is Aboriginal business.
 - Stop asking Aboriginal people to justify how they do Treaty – if the non-Aboriginal community can add or offer any skills that allow Aboriginal communities to thrive and hold their own power & drive it – then show your support.
 - Trusted allies from the non-Aboriginal community are important but Aboriginal community need space to do their business and make their own decisions. There doesn't have to be one way of doing things.
 - Having to constantly share culture and prove culture to the non-Aboriginal community is exhausting for Aboriginal community.

QUESTION AND ANSWER:

Perspectives from three Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Members

Q: Has the roadmap to reconciliation worked given the rate of Aboriginal children in care has doubled?

- Clearly it hasn't worked in this area. Amazing champions are advocating to shift this. This is an example where this country has failed us. We work in structures and systems that there are unconscious behaviours that are repeated again and again that add to this. There is a psyche in this country with non-Aboriginal people that the problem exists with black people. We need to continue to agitate and challenge, where there is effective change – where our people are governing and forming the way change is done where there is accountability.
- Bad decisions not being held to account
- [Grandmothers against Removal of Aboriginal Children](#) is an Aboriginal led group worth supporting – with a focus to get grandmothers out and connecting and telling about the trauma of children being abused in homes they are taken to.
- We have to decolonise, empower clans and nations across this country...we need to have people speaking language, people on country. Government talks self-determination but doesn't do it. We can decolonise together.

Q: What can people do to support the 38 nations of SE Australia to have equal say at the Victorian Treaty process/table?

- Communities need to be able to go back to country and decolonise. We need to empower those nations to have a say, to self determination
- We need people to pay the rent for being on stolen land which will enable us to connect and heal
- Community are so ripped apart – even having conversations brings up grief. Hope to find a framework that brings us together – commit to loving one another and claim the challenges and fears that have ripped us apart historically.

Q: How can we support a First Peoples' Voice?

- Put pressure on local MPs in your local area, educate people about why Voice is important. Put pressure on decision makers, they are walking away from what we called for at Uluru. Register your support for the [Statement from the Heart](#)
- Let's look into the idea of having 2 seats in every territory/state for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Q: How can we best support your cause? How do you believe non-Indigenous people can support these fights?

- We're trying to build a people's movement, and we need you. Whatever we are trying to achieve, we need your support.
 - Root cause of all issues and a flaw in democracy is that our voices are not heard by decisionmakers and they are not held accountable for those bad decisions
- Personal action and political action.

- It is impossible for Aboriginal people to be everywhere to drive what needs to happen. You are in positions of influence – in families, in your institutions – what are you doing to influence their relationship with first nations? What are you doing to make sure people are making reconciliation happen?
- Schools fail to have First Nations content
- Respectfully advocate, as non-Aboriginal people you have a different perspective - think about future generations
- We are not one homogenous group that are going to agree on everything.
 - We need to empower our clans and nations.
 - Pay the rent campaign – enables us to activate.
 - Absolute human rights are being breached in this state. We have to look internationally for examples options may include how we detach ourselves from the crown and together rewrite the rule book.