

INVITATION: Multicultural Framework Review Consultation

Submission: Inclusion of Pacific Women and their Families in the Multicultural Framework of Australia

Prepared by Loau Donina Va'a, Chair, Pacific Women's Professional Business Network Inc, August 21, 2023

This submission emphasizes the importance of recognizing the unique challenges and contributions of Pacific women in the multicultural fabric of Australia. Through collaboration, targeted reforms, and inclusive strategies, Pacific women and their families can have an equitable opportunity to thrive and enrich the Australian society. The inclusion of Pacific women in the multicultural fabric of Australia is not just a societal obligation but an opportunity to further enrich the Australian community. The combined efforts of government and non-governmental bodies, coupled with an empathetic community approach, can ensure the holistic integration of Pacific women and their families.

Introduction:

We commend the Australian government's commitment to fostering a multicultural society that values diversity, inclusion, and cohesion. However, it is essential to recognize that diversity within multiculturalism extends beyond ethnicity to encompass gender, and specific cultural nuances. This submission focuses on the need to include culturally appropriate strategies for Pacific women and their families within the broader multicultural framework.

Importance of Cultural Appropriateness:

Pacific women face unique challenges due to their intersectional identities as both women and members of Pacific communities. To ensure their full participation and integration into Australian society, it is crucial to tailor strategies that respect their cultural values, traditions, and needs. Currently, various government and non-government programs aim at promoting multiculturalism and assisting immigrant families. However, there are overlapping services in areas of language training, employment support, and cultural orientation. **Gaps:** There is a noticeable gap in addressing the unique cultural and societal challenges faced specifically by Pacific women, such as gender roles, societal expectations, and domestic responsibilities.

Recommendations:

Dedicated Funds for Culturally Appropriate Services:

Allocate dedicated funds to support the development and implementation of culturally sensitive services targeting Pacific women and their families. These funds should be utilized for the establishment of community centers, healthcare facilities, counselling services, and educational programs that reflect Pacific cultural practices. Provide financial and organizational support to existing Pacific women-led organizations. These organizations possess the expertise and cultural insights necessary to create impactful initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by Pacific women and their families.

Inclusion of Pacific Women in the Multicultural Framework:

Incorporate the perspectives of Pacific women and their families in policy discussions related to multiculturalism, social cohesion, and inclusion. Establish mechanisms to ensure their voices are heard and considered in all decision-making processes.

Cultural competency training:

Implement cultural competency training in workplaces, educational institutions, and healthcare sectors to ensure understanding and inclusivity.

Better, Inter-Governmental Collaboration and Coordination:

Ensure that federal arrangements align with state and local government settings to minimize duplication and address gaps, allocating resources appropriately. Establish collaboration frameworks that facilitate the sharing of best practices and culturally sensitive service models inclusive of Pacific women, so that they are not left behind. This includes having Pacific voice at the decision-making tables.

Data informed programs to eliminate systemic barriers:

Conduct thorough assessments to identify systemic barriers that hinder the full participation of Pacific women in Australian society. Develop comprehensive strategies to eliminate these barriers, including those stemming from racism and discrimination.

Leadership and Diversity: *Inclusion in Leadership, Educational, and Economic Opportunities*

The multicultural landscape of Australia is enriched by the myriad cultures, including the Pacific communities. Pacific women play pivotal roles within these communities, often juggling dual responsibilities of cultural preservation and integration into Australian society. Encourage Pacific women's leadership by developing diversity and inclusion strategies that provide pathways to leadership roles. Promote mentorship programs and create platforms for visibility and recognition.

Gaps Identified:

Pacific women in Australia face several key issues in education and leadership, often rooted in a combination of cultural, socio-economic, and systemic factors. These challenges can hinder their access to quality education, limit their opportunities for leadership roles, and contribute to underrepresentation in various sectors.

Access to Quality Education:

- Limited access to quality early childhood education programs, which can impact their overall educational development.
- Language barriers, as English may not be their first language, leading to difficulties in understanding and participating in educational activities.
- Limited educational resources that are culturally relevant and sensitive to their backgrounds.

Stereotypes and Cultural Expectations:

- Cultural stereotypes that might limit their career aspirations or educational pursuits, particularly in fields traditionally dominated by men.
- Cultural norms that prioritize family and community responsibilities, which can deter Pacific women from pursuing higher education or leadership roles.

Financial Constraints:

- Financial challenges that can hinder access to higher education or vocational training programs.
- Limited awareness of available scholarships, grants, or financial assistance specifically designed for Pacific women.

Lack of Representation and Role Models:

- Limited representation of Pacific women in educational materials, curriculum, and leadership positions, which can lead to a lack of relatable role models.

- A dearth of Pacific women in leadership positions within educational institutions, making it difficult for students to envision their own pathways to leadership.

Discrimination and Bias:

- Experiencing discrimination based on both gender and ethnicity, which can affect their self-confidence and hinder their educational and career progression.
- Stereotyping and bias that can contribute to microaggressions and lower expectations, impacting their learning experiences.

Balancing Cultural and Career Commitments:

- The challenge of balancing cultural expectations, family responsibilities, and community obligations with pursuing education and career opportunities.

Networking and Mentorship Opportunities:

- Limited access to networks and mentorship opportunities that could help Pacific women connect with professionals in their chosen fields and provide guidance for career advancement.

Lack of Cultural Sensitivity in Educational Settings:

- Educational institutions may not always create culturally sensitive and inclusive environments, leading to feelings of isolation or alienation.

Cultural Identity and Cultural Capital:

- Struggles with maintaining a strong cultural identity while adapting to a new environment can impact their sense of belonging and confidence.

Recommendations

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves educational institutions, government agencies, community organizations, and Pacific women themselves. Strategies should include creating culturally sensitive educational materials, providing mentorship opportunities, offering scholarships and financial support, promoting diversity and inclusion in leadership roles, ensure NGOs collaborate and provide meaningful connections with Pacific communities for grassroots community engagement, integrate Pacific histories and contributions in school curricula and amplify the reach of governmental announcements through translations and community collaborations. and fostering an environment that respects and values the unique perspectives and contributions of Pacific women. Strengthen public understanding of multiculturalism by incorporating Pacific cultural heritage into educational curricula, Australian celebrations, and awareness-raising campaigns. Highlight the shared Australian identity as a blend of diverse cultures.

Effective Communication and Engagement:

Implement a comprehensive communication strategy that engages multicultural Australia, including languages other than English. Utilize culturally sensitive communication channels and platforms to ensure messages resonate with Pacific women and their families.

Conclusion:

The successful integration of Pacific women and their families into Australian society necessitates a nuanced and culturally appropriate approach. By adopting the recommendations outlined above, the Australian government can demonstrate its commitment to fostering a truly inclusive and cohesive multicultural society that embraces the diverse needs and strengths of all Australians, regardless of their cultural background or gender.

Further information: pacificwomenpbn@gmail.com