

STEP 1: ARE WE READY FOR DEEP COLLABORATION?



OVERVIEW

The first step in Deep Collaboration is asking if everyone involved is ready to take part in finding new ways for First Nations and other Australians to lead together. This is different from having an adequate level of Cultural Competency.

We are asking people to be realistic about how much investment of time and energy will be required. What is your drive for Deep Collaboration? What are people's levels of readiness, willingness, capacity and urgency to collaborate? This takes a high level of awareness, honesty and courage.



DISCUSS

Build on strong foundations

Take time to understand your own purpose for doing this work and make sure you have the support you need. You will need people and/or processes to help you reflect and work with awareness. You will need to improvise and be creative at times. You will need courage and stamina when things are difficult.

Learn and evolve along the way

Deep Collaboration involves constant learning. You and others should have permission to ask questions, check your thinking, test ideas and resist jumping to solutions too quickly. We are trying to find new ways for First Nations and other Australians to lead together, which will involve learning, risk and getting it wrong at times.

Take responsibility for yourself

We all need to see ourselves as both part of the solution and, in some ways, part of the problem. This is not a criticism, but it recognises that Deep Collaboration asks everyone to move from where we are so that we can meet in a new place. This can be especially hard for people who are used to seeing others as the cause of the problems they work on.

Understand and own your power

Understanding our own power is an essential part of Deep Collaboration. You will need to commit to exploring your relationship to power and authority and better understanding how your power is perceived by others. Accepting and using our power can be difficult, especially across cultures. We need to see the power we all hold with new potential.

Understand and appreciate the impact of trauma

Trauma affects many people. It can be described as an event or process that overwhelms a person, family or community's capacity to cope. Trauma can be physical, psychological or spiritual.

It is important to recognise that grief, trauma and inter-generational trauma weigh heavily on First Nation Peoples. Colonisation, dispossession of land, violence, theft of wages and policies that punished the use of language, forbade cultural expression and led to the atrocities such as the stolen generation degrade us all. This trauma has impacted the formation of our Australian identity and has an inter-generational impact on all Australians in our relationship with each other (Paulo Freire writes about the de-humanising impact of colonisation on the oppressor as well as the oppressed¹).

To practice Deep Collaboration well, we need to have an understanding and appreciation that the trauma inflicted in Australia's history, has a lasting impact on the relationship between First Nations and other Australians.

Allow Mistakes

Learning to collaborate requires us to test our assumptions and try new ways of working. We will all inevitably make mistakes. When different levels of power and the impact of trauma is present there can be little tolerance for getting it wrong. This should be discussed upfront to be clear on what conditions are needed with your collaboration - to be sensitive to making mistakes, and to be able to learn together what is needed for collaboration.

¹ Freire, Paulo [Pedagogy of the Oppressed](#), 2017 Ed, Penguin. Chapter 1



SKILLS

Build a brave and ‘safe enough’ space

Safety is the first issue in the relationships between First Nations and other Australians. There is often no such thing as a completely ‘safe space’ when we work together in this way. The goal here is to create enough safety for people to commit to working together through this process.

Understand the conditions for change

Change only happens when the time and conditions are right. We need to have enough time and resources. The people involved need to be ready for a different way of working. Pay attention to the signals you are getting from people about how ready they are.

We also need to understand the boundaries before we start. Is your organisation committed to sustain the work for as long as is needed? Does it have the capacity to support you and others? Short-term attempts that fail often reinforce existing attitudes and make change harder for others.

Create your own conditions for change

You may not have all the conditions needed for Deep Collaboration at the start. That doesn’t mean you can’t create what you need. This includes things like:

- Developing and maintain networks and coalitions of allies
- Creating spaces and processes for working through the challenges such as talking to others or spiritual practice
- Making space in your group/organisation for reflecting on progress and celebrating success
- Nurturing yourself and others to prevent burn out
- Valuing your skills and contributions to the collaboration