

How to decolonise meetings

Language, interpretation, and translation

Note for both white and for black and brown practitioners: Historically, English has been the language of both instruction and authority, and the use of indigenous language has been discouraged in professional and educational spaces. There is a huge benefit to decolonisation processes if this can be reversed.

Yielding Power

- ☐ Encourage black and brown colleagues to run meetings and processes in their own language. Let them know that you are happy to be supported with someone to translate for you.
- ☐ Check with partners to see if translating key documents into local languages is required or preferred.
- ☐ Take translation and interpretation costs into account when designing and budgeting for programs.
- ☐ Explore how online meeting systems can be used to support interpretation. For example, you can enable interpretation for [Zoom](#), [Webex](#), and [Google Meet](#).
- ☐ Build resilience to not knowing everything that's going on and to the possibility that people are discussing you without you knowing. The long-term empowerment benefits of people using their own language – and the improved program outcomes of people having more honest conversations – will outweigh your short-term discomfort.

Wielding Power

- ☐ Explain to white management and colleagues why using your own language is important in the office space and in implementing programs with stakeholders.
- ☐ Build some skills in translating, interpreting and/or reassuring your white colleagues that you will be providing them with the information they need from processes which are not run in English.
- ☐ Explore how online meeting systems can be used to support interpretation. For example, you can enable interpretation for [Zoom](#), [Webex](#), and [Google Meet](#).

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Preparing for and participating in decolonised meetings

Note for both white and for black and brown practitioners: Be aware of, and actively break down social barriers – make sure there are not ‘expatriate groups’ and ‘local groups’ at meetings and functions.

Yielding Power

- ☐ Ensure that sufficient time is available for meals, socialising and ‘fellowship’ during meetings and workshops.
- ☐ Assume all meetings and workshops will be opened with a prayer, even if the processes are hosted in Australia for an Australian group. By doing so, you will demonstrate willingness from the white team to give up the primacy of their cultural environment.
- ☐ Deconstruct any meeting spaces which implicitly or explicitly establish your or your white colleagues as superior (for example, being seated at the head of the table, or being seated on a chair and not on a mat).
- ☐ Learn to be comfortable with silence. If there is silence in a meeting, don’t feel you need to fill it. Count to 10, then count to 10 again.
- ☐ Foster spaces where black and brown colleagues feel comfortable expressing the intersect between their beliefs and work, especially belief in God and Christian views.
- ☐ Observe Pacific protocols in all engagements with stakeholders. Recognise the additional burden on black and brown staff to educate white staff on local customs and protocols.

Wielding Power

- ☐ Guide the development of the schedules of meetings and workshops to ensure Pacific Islander priorities are reflected.
- ☐ Offer to provide an opening prayer if it seems that white colleagues are not going to include it in a meeting or process. Demonstrate inclusivity by acknowledging other faiths represented in the room and by inviting them to give a prayer, meditation, or devotion.
- ☐ Accept sitting at the head of the table or in other positions of ‘spatial power’ in meetings. Encourage your black and brown colleagues to do likewise.
- ☐ Express your views in meetings, even if this sometimes makes you feel exposed or uncomfortable.
- ☐ Do not self-censor or remove reference to your beliefs from your discourse.
- ☐ Discuss with managers the local customs and protocols that should be observed. Explain how doing so could build affinity between the program and the communities it works with. Advise on the formal protocols to welcome and farewell guests.