

Peter Cooley – Director, Koori Communications & Training.

I think the idea of a Minority Business Council for Indigenous Australians is a good one; however the scope of this Council needs to move beyond facilitating relationships with just corporate organizations to also include government bodies.

Indigenous business can play an important role in overcoming disadvantage in Indigenous communities; however, it is very disappointing to note current government policies can often discriminate against Indigenous businesses who would like to pitch for funding to help their own people. If an organization is not a charity, voluntary or not for profit then it is restricted from applying for funding.

Only last week, I was out in a community where juvenile justice is a huge issue with local police noting increased rates of offending, when a local community member pleaded with a FaHCSIA representative to work with me, as I am running successful diversionary programs in so many other communities. That government official said they could not work with me as I was a 'company.' On the other hand, another Federal Government body, Department of Agriculture, Forestry's and Fisheries has funded me as a company to run 10 fishing programs around NSW for Aboriginal youth and my expenditure will be audited just as it would a not for profit or incorporated organization.

The first example, is only one of many cases where this policy has had a negative affect on communities for which the funding is supposed to help. It has also severely restricted the growth of successful Indigenous businesses that could act as quality mentors and employers.

If government wants to forge new partnerships with Indigenous Australia they must first recognize that some Indigenous leaders with valuable skills and knowledge have entered the corporate path to improve outcomes for Indigenous communities because of the frustration of continued failure of government and other agencies to properly engage in and improve outcomes for Indigenous communities.

Koori Communications and Training is one such example. I provide practical pathways for Indigenous youth to engage with the broader community. I have won awards for my professionally run, culturally sympathetic, thoroughly researched training initiatives and have received substantial positive feedback from the participants and the community about the long term success of the programs that I design. Yet my company benefits more financially by providing the same programs to the mainstream community than pitching for the substantial funding earmarked for Indigenous communities. On one hand this is good for Koori Communications and the mainstream community, but on the other hand it is disappointing as I know a lot of Indigenous communities are crying out for positive programs such as the programs I design and run.

My experience of being Aboriginal and working on the ground in Aboriginal communities makes me passionate about finding or developing solutions which empower communities by teaching the skills needed to run their own show instead of paying consultants huge amounts of money to serve as mere auditors of government money who leave no skill development on the ground when they are gone because more often than not they have no experience in the issues they are sent to manage. My business provides a good business model for Indigenous people as to what can be achieved.

I don't expect any favoritism, just a level playing field where outcomes and results are judged equally against others. Private companies can be audited just like a not for profit, for money received from government grants. I hope that this Committee will consider making a recommendation for all government policies about Indigenous funding to be reviewed with the view of allowing professional Indigenous businesses to pitch for this funding to provide more opportunities to help Indigenous communities.

Regards

Peter Cooley

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