



Policy

Cultural Safety

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As the peak body for architecture, the Australian Institute of Architects aims to lead in relation to maintaining cultural safety for First Nations staff, members, architects, and community members. Cultural safety is important to ensure First Nations peoples feel respected, safe, and valued. Furthermore, the built environments that our members, as architects, create must be culturally safe in both the outcomes and also the process of design.

Smoking Ceremony. Photograph by Gabriel Clark

Cultural safety is understood to be an environment that is safe for all people, in which there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. Cultural safety is about deep listening to share respect, knowledge, meaning, knowledge and experiences of working, learning, and living together with dignity.

Cultural safety means not speaking for others or on others’ behalf without their approval. It gives voice to those who are often silenced and space to those who have been excluded. Importantly, cultural safety allows time for all who need to be heard. Cultural safety ensures that identities are not challenged, and all expressions of culture are enabled, irrespective of personal opinions.¹

1— Nursing Council of New Zealand, 1992, *Standards for registration of comprehensive mases from poly-technic courses*.

1

Critical Self-Reflection

Critical self-reflection is the practice of recognising unconscious biases, and identifying, questioning, and assessing how these affect one’s own thought and actions. Critical self-reflection requires awareness of one’s own deeply held assumptions and challenging them in their own established ways of thinking. Critical self-reflection is recognising how beliefs and values inform attitudes, behaviours, and professional practice.

2

Address Power Imbalances

Critical self-reflection is the practice of recognising unconscious biases, and identifying, questioning, and assessing how these affect one’s own thought and actions. Critical self-reflection requires awareness of one’s own deeply held assumptions and challenging them in their own established ways of thinking. Critical self-reflection is recognising how beliefs and values inform attitudes, behaviours, and professional practice.

3

Inclusive, Clear And Respectful

Inclusive, clear, and respectful communications is using dialogue that engages with active listening and compassion. Inclusive, clear, and respectful communications is using language that is appropriate, and respects diverse beliefs and values. Inclusive, clear, and respectful communications make space for differing views and nuanced understandings. Inclusive, clear, and respectful communications is developing trust and engaging in dialogue where knowledge is shared and understood.

4

Learn, Unlearn, Relearn

Learning, unlearning, and relearning recognises the need for lifelong transformative unlearning in relation to unconscious bias. Learning, unlearning, and relearning reflects on how actions might be disempowering others, identifying culturally unsafe behaviours, and actively changing them. Learning, unlearning, and relearning is addressing the systems and structures that limit or disempower others.

Cultural Unsafety

Cultural unsafety can lead to enduring trauma and stress for First Nations peoples. As such it is important to understand and be able to identify culturally unsafe practices. Culturally unsafe practices and interactions include:

- Discriminatory, racist, demeaning, sexist, or demeaning commentary
- Stereotyping and tokenism
- Colonising language or practices
- Operating from assumptions
- Upholding power differentials and dominance
- De-identifying others who identify as First Nations peoples.

Cultural Safety In Space

We all live, play and work in built environments. As such it is critical to ensure that the design of those environments is embedded with culturally safe values. Culturally safe spaces, for First Nations peoples, are environments where First Nations histories are visible in the environment, First Nations identities are supported through the design of places, and First Nations experiences are respected in the use of the spaces.

To create culturally safe spaces, architects must consider the enculturated values they may hold towards space, noting that their design values may be derived from a dominant cultural Western perspective. Often culturally unsafe places are created not through malice, but through a lack of empathetic consideration. When aiming to design for cultural safety, designers must actively work to reconsider assumptions they may have in their response to design, putting themselves in the design through the eyes of all possible users.

- Design outcomes and products
- Design processes
- Communications and engagement with First Nations peoples
- Ensuring the safety of Country
- Behaviour while on Country
- How business is undertaken
- How each person thinks and acts.

Footsteps on Country. Photograph by Daniele Hromek.

The Australian Institute of Architects works to ensure all First Nations peoples including staff, members, architects, and any community members they may be working with are treated with respect and sensitivity. The Australian Institute of Architects recognises diversity and celebrates differences. The Australian Institute of Architects works to ensure that there is acknowledgement and respect of the values, beliefs, identity and cultural understandings of its First Nations peoples who are staff, members, architects, and any community they may be working with. The Australian Institute of Architects will in no way diminish, demean, or disempower anyone based on their cultural ways and needs.



Walking Country. Photograph by Danièle Hromek.

RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS CULTURAL SAFETY

Cultural safety is everyone’s responsibility. As such we have agreed the following responsibilities towards achieving cultural safety.



Australian Institute of Architects is responsible for:

- Providing information and access to resources and materials on cultural safety to all staff and members
- Taking steps to ensure consistent application of this policy
- Ensuring the protocols of the communities they work with are known and adhered to by Institute staff
- Addressing ongoing harm caused by colonisation and the outcomes of that harm
- Developing and maintaining genuine relationships with First Nations communities
- Understanding and being mindful of the cultural load on First Nations peoples
- Taking steps to investigate allegations or complaints of breaches of this policy.

Australian Institute of Architects staff are responsible for:

- Undertake cultural competency, awareness, anti-racism, anti-discrimination training
- Being aware of this policy and framework in relation to cultural safety
- Undertaking critical reflection to consider own behaviours, beliefs, and practices, and using inclusive and respectful dialogue
- Avoiding use of colonising or othering language
- Attending ongoing training which facilitates an applied knowledge of cultural safety in their work environment
- Developing and exhibiting sensitivity to historical influences on the wellbeing of others
- Acknowledging and working to minimise power differentials and dominance
- Acting to ensure equitable and respectful engagement, including leaving sufficient time for engagement
- Refraining from culturally unsafe practices and interactions, and where safe to do so, challenging potentially unsafe practices and interactions
- Accepting that others have differing worldviews and perspectives
- Conducting themselves in a culturally safe manner.



Walking Country. Photograph by Daniele Fromek.

APPENDICES

Australian Institute of Architects members are recommended to:

- Undertake cultural competency, awareness, anti-racism, anti-discrimination training
- Implementing culturally safe policies and practices in their own practices and processes
- Undertaking critical reflection to consider own behaviours, beliefs and practices, and using inclusive and respectful dialogue
- Avoiding use of colonising or othering language
- Attending ongoing training to facilitate an applied knowledge of cultural safety in their work environment
- Asking any First Nations communities they are communicating or working with what their protocols are
- Understanding and being mindful of the cultural load on First Nations peoples
- Addressing ongoing harm caused by colonisation and the outcomes of that harm
- Developing and exhibiting sensitivity to historical influences on the wellbeing of others
- Acknowledging and working to minimise power differentials and dominance
- Acting to ensure equitable and respectful engagement, including leaving sufficient time for engagement
- Developing and maintaining genuine relationships with First Nations communities
- Refraining from culturally unsafe practices and interactions, and where safe to do so, challenging potentially unsafe practices and interactions
- Accepting that others have differing worldviews and perspectives
- Conducting themselves in a culturally safe manner.

With thanks to members of the First Nations
Advisory Committee for generously sharing
their experiences and thoughts about
cultural safety.

