

Increasing cultural diversity in public sector leadership

The PSC has created a new sponsorship program – Elevate & Advocate – as part of a wider strategy to increase cultural diversity in public sector senior leadership. The program is designed to meet the sector’s commitment to workforce inclusion and to ensure sector leadership reflects NSW’s diversity.

Elevate & Advocate was developed in response to data that showed significant underrepresentation of people from CALD backgrounds in senior leadership roles and following consultations with employees who shared profound challenges and experiences of bias. Its aim is to remove barriers and improve pathways into senior leadership for CALD employees, and to support senior executives to become allies and advocates, and engage in anti-bias capability uplift.

Elevate & Advocate is part of a holistic strategy for CALD employee inclusion, addressing barriers and biases that employees have articulated they experience as they work towards their career goals. The program has garnered support at all levels, including from the Secretaries Board, underscoring its significance in addressing this persistent challenge.

Creating a culture of inclusion

Unlike traditional mentoring programs, Elevate & Advocate sponsors have a stake in the career development of the person they are paired with. Potential sponsors and those seeking mentoring must demonstrate their commitment and capability by completing an expression of interest. A dedicated panel then undertakes a meticulous assessment and matching process to ensure the right partnerships are created. Investing the time and effort in building strong relationships sets Elevate & Advocate participants up for success and drives accountability. Participants meet regularly to foster a sense of community and collaboration across the entire cohort of sponsors and participants. The program also helps to drive a culture of inclusion across the sector.

In 2023, there were more than 500 expressions of interest for the first round of the program, including 70 from potential senior executive sponsors. In this round, 32 CALD employees were paired with senior executives, including secretaries and deputy secretaries. This level of interest raises the profile of CALD leadership issues and builds momentum for systemic change across the public sector.

Promoting lasting success

The program’s impact is already evident, with several early success stories. Four sponsored employees have successfully obtained roles at higher levels due to the support of and coaching from their sponsors. Others report that their sponsors are helping them plan career trajectories and overcome barriers. Sponsors call the program “groundbreaking” and “a game changer”, saying they have a better understanding of the barriers faced by CALD staff and what they can do as allies and advocates to promote inclusion.

Participants are measured throughout the program using evidence-based criteria, with the aim of promoting lasting success. Elevate & Advocate is designed for mutual learning. Participants report that their conversations are improving service delivery for NSW customers, due to insights and perspectives being shared between sponsors and sponsored employees.