



Caring for Country Aboriginal Relationships Toolkit

Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy for the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

December 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Darug, Dharawal, and Gundungurra peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters, and skies across the Cumberland Plain. We honour and pay our deepest respects to Elders past, present, and emerging, who hold and pass on the knowledge, traditions, and cultural practices that have sustained these lands for tens of thousands of years.

This Caring for Country Aboriginal Relationships Framework (the Framework) is developed with gratitude and recognition of the ongoing connection that Aboriginal peoples have to Country. We honour the wisdom and stewardship of Traditional Custodians and commit to walking alongside them in caring for Country, conserving biodiversity, and fostering cultural and environmental sustainability.

We also acknowledge the diverse Aboriginal communities across Western Sydney who contribute their knowledge, skills, and care for Country, including those who may not be Traditional Custodians but are connected to Country and continue to enrich the cultural fabric and resilience of this region.

In the spirit of respect and reconciliation, we commit to embedding Aboriginal voices, values, and leadership in all aspects of our work, ensuring that this Framework supports self-determination and strengthens the cultural and environmental legacy of the Cumberland Plain.

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Caring for Country Aboriginal Relationships Toolkit

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The NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure (the Department) is committed to applying Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property principles, which establish an ethical and standard approach to give effect to the rights of Aboriginal people's need to maintain, control, protect and develop their Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

Drafting of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Relationships Framework and Toolkit has been in collaboration with numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and contributors who generously shared their knowledge, culture, and time. The Department has applied these principles in developing this document, guided by its Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol .

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Please also refer to the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure's Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol for further information about how the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure handles Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual.

Note on language and terminology

This document uses the term "relationships" in place of "engagement" wherever possible to reflect a shift from transactional consultation to meaningful and effective, long-term connection. This approach acknowledges that Traditional Custodians are not so-called 'stakeholders' to be consulted but Peoples with sovereign and deep historical and ancestral cultural responsibilities for Country. Some references to "engagement" are retained where required for consistency with policy, planning, or legislative terminology.

While we have worked hard to ensure this document is representative in recognising all who are connected to Country within the CPCP region, we are aware that terminology within this Framework may not be the preferred choice for some. For this Framework and the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy, we use the name Aboriginal to recognise the Traditional Custodians of NSW and those with connection to Country within the CPCP region. We have used the spelling Darug, Dharawal, and Gundungurra to represent the Traditional Custodians of the CPCP region, however, we are aware that there are numerous accepted spellings of these names, as they have been passed on verbally for many generations and have been subject to different interpretations.



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About this Toolkit

This Aboriginal Relationships Toolkit accompanies the [Caring for Country Relationships Framework](#) (the Framework) and should be read in conjunction with it. Together, they provide a comprehensive package to support culturally respectful, effective, and accountable relationships with Aboriginal communities.

The Toolkit is a practical resource designed to support staff in the Resilience and Sustainability Division of the NSW Department of Planning, Housing, and Infrastructure (the Department). It provides guidance, tools, and templates to ensure meaningful, respectful, and effective relations with Aboriginal communities, aligning with implementation of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy and the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP).

This Toolkit translates the principles and protocols outlined in the Framework into practical actions. It equips staff with the knowledge and resources to navigate Aboriginal cultural landscapes of the Cumberland Plain, meet legal and policy obligations, and foster effective and enduring relationships that respect Aboriginal self-determination, cultural heritage, and connection to Country. By focusing on practical implementation, the Toolkit ensures that relationships are inclusive, impactful, and culturally informed.

This Toolkit is not a flat-pack checklist to be assembled by step-by-step instruction. Its value lies in thoughtful use, professional judgment, and an openness to adapt and listen. Building strong relationships requires more than following a guide - it requires thought, time, respect, and cultural humility.





Principles for effective relationships

These principles underpin the Framework and Toolkit. They guide how we build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal communities across the Cumberland Plain, ensuring that our interactions are respectful, purposeful, and culturally grounded.

By embedding these principles into our daily work, we can strengthen trust, support self-determination, and contribute to outcomes that reflect the values and priorities of both communities and Country. These principles also acknowledge the cultural, environmental, and historical contexts that shape our responsibilities as public servants working on Aboriginal land.

1. Respect

Description: Respect for Aboriginal rights, cultural authority, and protocols is the foundation of ethical and effective relationships. It means recognising the ongoing impacts of colonisation, valuing Aboriginal worldviews, and supporting self-determination and agency.

Practical application:

- Build your cultural competency and capability.
- Observe cultural protocols, such as appropriate ways of addressing Elders.
- Ensure free, prior, and informed consent for all activities.
- Acknowledge and address the history and impact of colonisation when engaging.
- Avoid tokenism or extractive practices that centre government outcomes over community benefit.

2. Purpose

Description: All relationship-building efforts should have a clear, communicated purpose. Communities should understand why you are connecting, what the process involves, and how their knowledge and input will influence outcomes.





Practical application:

- Clearly articulate goals, scope, and decision-making processes.
- Share honestly what can and cannot be achieved.
- Share how input has been considered or acted upon and provide regular updates to maintain transparency and trust throughout the process.
- Remember not to place an undue burden on Traditional Custodians or communities to provide all the answers. Acknowledge that Caring for Country requires shared effort, mutual learning, and partnerships between government and communities.

3. Inclusion

Description: Strong relationships are inclusive of the diversity that exists within and between Aboriginal communities. This means ensuring that Elders, youth, women, kinship groups, and people with lived experience of disability or marginalisation are heard and valued.

Practical application:

- Take time to understand community dynamics and ensure that all key kinship groups are included.
- Actively seek out voices from underrepresented groups within the community.
- Use accessible venues and provide necessary support (e.g., for people who do not have access to the internet).
- Use culturally appropriate communication methods, such as storytelling and visual aids.
- Design processes that include geographically and socially diverse participants.

4. Walking together

Description: Walking together means taking the time to build trust, showing up consistently, and being present beyond formal projects. It recognises that relationships must be mutual and reciprocal where knowledge, time, and energy are exchanged in ways that benefit both Aboriginal communities and the broader work of caring for Country.





Practical application:

- Take time to truly listen and act on what you hear.
- Ensure you are actively in relationship-building alongside consultants. Relationships can't be nurtured outsourced. Showing up matters.
- Prioritise ongoing communication, even outside of formal projects.
- Build in opportunities for reciprocity – such as shared learning, acknowledgement, and support for Aboriginal-led initiatives.
- Attend community events to build familiarity and trust outside of official relations.

The relationship itself is an important outcome. Building trust, showing respect, and walking together with Traditional Custodians are just as vital as the specific policy or program objective you are working on. A strong process is part of achieving strong outcomes -for Country and community.

5. Empowerment

Description: Empowering Aboriginal communities supports self-determination, enabling them to lead and co-develop solutions that align with their priorities.

Practical application:

- Use the Relationship Matrix in this Framework's toolkit to consider the level of connection you will be focusing on, and to enhance your own capacity.
- Share decision-making power and co-design initiatives.
- Invest in capacity-building to support leadership and autonomy.
- Celebrate and acknowledge the contributions of community members in meaningful ways.
- Ensure intellectual and cultural contributions are not appropriated, but respected and attributed appropriately - through acknowledgements, shared authorship, and clear statements of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) where relevant.

6. Accountability

- **Description:** Effective relationships lead to measurable, meaningful outcomes. Regular evaluation ensures practices remain effective, respectful, and responsive to community needs.



Practical application:

- Set clear, realistic, and measurable objectives and track progress.
- Seek perspectives from participants and refine practices based on what you learn.
- Document agreements and share them communities to ensure transparency.
- Create and share reports on the outcomes of activities, highlighting how community input has influenced decisions.
- 'Report back and close the loop'. Demonstrate ongoing commitment to shared goals.

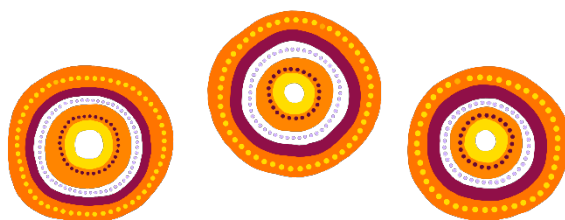
Adopt a whole-of-government and whole-of-department mindset and listen to and be responsive to issues outside your immediate responsibility.

7. Adaptability

Description: Strong and effective relationships require flexibility. Being adaptable means responding to community needs, cultural protocols, and changing circumstances with respect and humility. No two communities are the same -and relationships must be shaped by place, context, and lived experience.

Practical application:

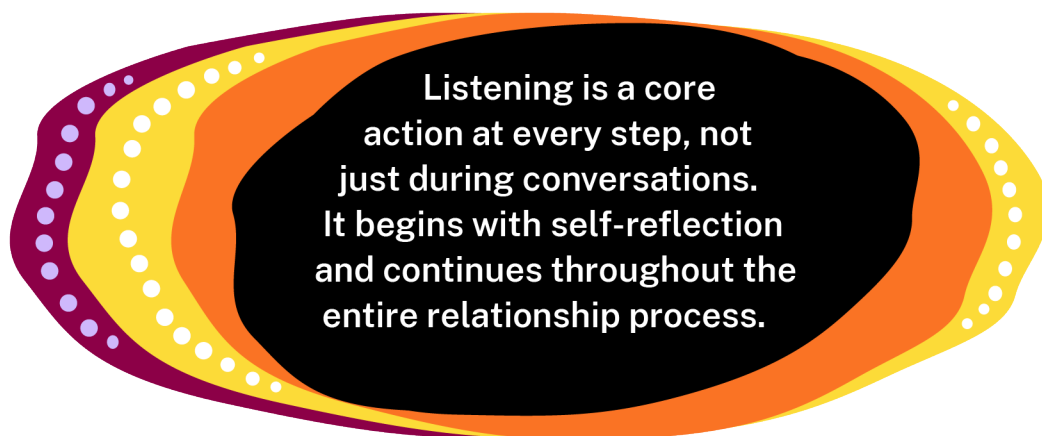
- Be open to feedback and advice and reflect on lessons learned.
- Continuously refine approaches to stay effective and respectful.
- Be flexible with timelines to accommodate community priorities and cultural obligations.
- Allow time for internal community discussions — Aboriginal decision-making is often collective and cannot be rushed.
- Anticipate and plan for challenges, such as Sorry Business, community conflict, weather, or conflicting schedules, and adjust plans accordingly.





Relationships process

This relationship-based, five-step process provides a structured and practical approach for staff in the Resilience and Sustainability Division of the Department to work effectively with Aboriginal communities under the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy. The steps -Think, Plan, Prepare, Connect, Evaluate-help ensure that work with Traditional Custodians and other relevant Aboriginal peoples and organisations is culturally respectful, impactful, and aligned with the goals of the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan (CPCP).



1. Think – understanding the context

Before initiating relationship-building activities, take the time to reflect on the purpose, context, and desired outcomes that can co-designed with the community. Start with listening. While 'Think' is the first step in this model, listening must begin even earlier. Deep listening helps identify community needs before planning begins, supporting truly grounded and culturally respectful relationships. Consider the cultural, historical, and environmental significance of the area and project. And remember that Traditional Custodians and other Aboriginal people won't have all the answers – any they shouldn't be expected to.



Key actions:

- **Identify key parties to involve:** This includes Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal organisations that are party to Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) under the Native Title Act 1993 (who also have specific legal rights to be consulted), Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), and other Aboriginal organisations and individuals actively engaged in Caring for Country.
- **Understand the history:** Research and understand the cultural and historical background of the area and Aboriginal peoples, including past interactions with government and the impacts of colonisation. Search for and ask about any past Native Title claims - successful and unsuccessful.
- **Clarify objectives:** Define what you aim to achieve and how it aligns with Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy goals.

Example: Before planning activities on Darug Country, review the area's cultural heritage and previous community feedback on similar initiatives. Do your research.

Research is not only on the internet. Search out Aboriginal and other experienced colleagues and peers to learn more. Aboriginal cultures in particular are oral.

2. Plan – designing the relationship connection

Develop a clear plan that respects cultural protocols, ensures inclusivity, and aligns with legal and policy requirements.

Key actions:

- **Set goals and timelines:** Define realistic objectives and allow adequate time for consultation and community input.
- **Map relevant people and organisations:** Identify and prioritise individuals and groups, considering diversity within communities.
- **Develop materials:** Create accessible resources (e.g., plain English documents, yarning sheets, maps, or visuals) that explain the project's purpose and potential impacts.
- **Plan for reciprocity:** Build in mechanisms to give back to the community, such as payment for cultural advice, capacity-building opportunities, or funding support.

Example: For a biodiversity restoration project, include Traditional Custodians and other relevant Aboriginal people involved in caring for Country in co-design workshops to consider the potential of integrating cultural practices, such as cultural burning.



3. Prepare – build cultural competence

Preparation ensures you're ready to show up respectfully and effectively.

Key actions:

- **Consult cultural advisors:** Consult with Elders or cultural advisors to guide the process and validate the approach.
- **Secure necessary training:** Ensure all staff involved have completed cultural competency training.
- **Share who's attending:** Always let Aboriginal participants know in advance who will be attending the meeting, including names, roles, and organisational backgrounds. This helps build trust, avoids surprises, and ensures that people feel culturally safe and respected.
- **Confirm protocols:** Verify the appropriate protocols for the area, such as who to contact first and how or when to conduct an Acknowledgment of Country.
- **Prepare for flexibility:** Anticipate the need for adjustments based on community feedback or cultural events.
- **Respect people's time and travel:** Where possible, combine engagement activities and allow for longer, more meaningful sessions (e.g., half-day meetings rather than short check-ins), especially when community members are travelling long distances. This helps reduce fatigue and shows respect for the time, knowledge and effort that Aboriginal participants bring.

Example: Before conducting a community meeting, consider inviting a cultural advisor to guide the session and ensure that seating arrangements and discussion formats align with cultural norms. It's also important not to cite "engagement fatigue" or tight timelines as reasons to skip engagement. Community members have clearly said they want to contribute - they just need better conditions, including fair payment, flexibility, and genuine opportunities to shape the process.





Cultural competency commitment

The Resilience and Sustainability Division is committed to ongoing cultural competency development - not just one-off cultural awareness sessions. This deeper learning is essential to fostering genuine, respectful, and informed relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Our Division's commitment aligns with the Connecting with Country Framework, which highlights the need for relational, long-term learning approaches, and responds to the historical lack of cultural training across academia, planning, environmental science, and related industries. Cultural competency is not a destination - it is a continuous journey that requires reflection, humility, and action.

While the Division invests in cultural competency training, real understanding also depends on individual commitment to ongoing learning - especially given the wider gaps in education, media, and professional practice.

4. Connect – build and reinforce the relationship

This is where meaningful connections are formed, and relationships take shape.

Key actions:

- **Start with respect:** Begin with a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgment of Country and ensure Elders or key community leaders are comfortable and recognised.
- **Facilitate dialogue:** Use open-ended questions and active listening to encourage meaningful contributions.
- **Attend with purpose:** Whenever possible, staff should be physically present for meetings, yarning circles, or key activities led by consultants. Face-to-face ensures relationships are developed with - not just on behalf of - the Department.
- **Be transparent:** Clearly explain how community input will be used and provide updates on progress.
- **Adapt in real-time:** Respond to feedback or unforeseen issues willingly, respectfully, and flexibly.

Example: During a yarning circle about waterway management, focus on active listening and allow time for participants to share stories about their connections to local rivers. Provide a tea or coffee break to allow for informal discussions and negotiations among Aboriginal participants.



In many Aboriginal communities, time is experienced differently to Western systems. Relationships and decisions are grounded in cycles, stories, and consultation across generations and kinship lines. One person alone may not be in a position to respond or decide on behalf of others. Be prepared to listen, pause, and return.

5. Evaluate – reflect and improve

Evaluation ensures that processes are effective, inclusive, and meet community and project goals.

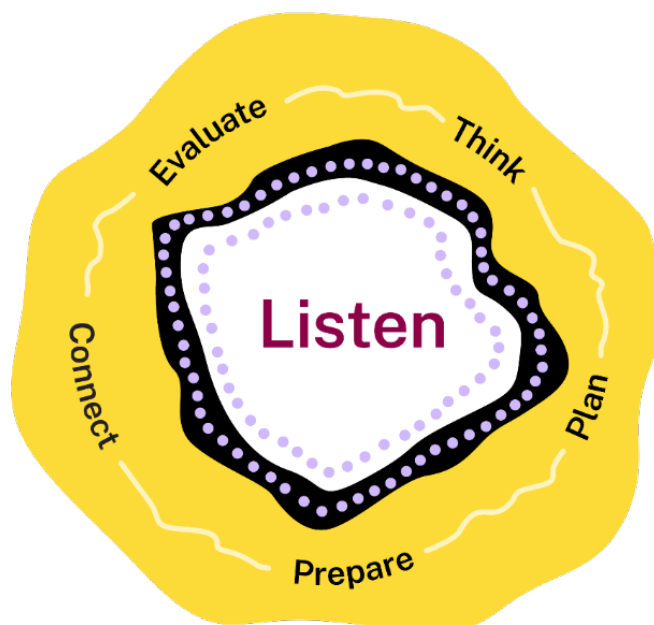
Key actions:

- **Seek insights:** Ask participants for their views on the process and outcomes.
- **Measure impact:** Compare results against initial objectives and identify areas for improvement.
- **Document and share:** Record lessons learned and share insights with colleagues to refine future connections.
- **Close the loop:** Report back to communities on how their input influenced decisions, acknowledge their contributions, and commit to next steps.

Example: After completing a conservation project, share a summary report with the community, highlighting how their insights shaped the outcomes and inviting further reflections and insights.

This five-step process ensures that relationships with Aboriginal peoples are thoughtful, respectful, and impactful, fostering stronger partnerships and better outcomes for Aboriginal communities and the environment.

Remember that relationships are not linear with a finite end. They're a cycle.





Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) for Caring for Country

A dedicated Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) framework is being developed to measure how well the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy is being implemented.

This will include assessing Theme 1: Partnering with Aboriginal Communities, and how effectively relationship-based activities — such as yarning circles, co-design processes, on-Country meetings, and collaborative planning — are being carried out. The MER framework will help track progress over time, highlight what's working, and ensure that Aboriginal voices remain central in how success is defined and evaluated. It will also align with the broader MER framework for the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan.





Aboriginal relationships planning template

This template is designed to assist you in structuring the planning process for relationships and communication with Aboriginal peoples to ensure it is effective, inclusive, and culturally appropriate.

Category	Details
Project/activity name	
Date and Location	
Lead	Name and contact details of the lead
Traditional Custodians	Who are the Custodians of the land where the activity is occurring? Is there any formal recognition of Traditional Custodians under State land rights legislation or the Native Title Act? Is there any disagreement on Traditional Custodianship that you need to be aware of and consider?
Other relevant local Aboriginal people	Are there other relevant Aboriginal people caring for Country in the locations about which you plan to engage?
Previous connections	Have there been any previous connections or engagement? What feedback was received last time? Is there a risk of engagement fatigue in the community and how can this be managed?
Purpose	What are your objectives? How do they align with the CPCP Commitment 21? How do they align with Connection with Country by GANSW?





Participants and contributors	<p>Who are the key participants (ILUA holders, LALCs, Youth, community groups)?</p> <p>Have their roles and connections to the project been identified?</p> <p>Is there a possibility of combining this engagement with that of other activities or partners?</p>
Format	<p>Using the Caring for Country Relationship Matrix, what connection level to you expect to be operating at?</p> <p>What methods will be used (e.g., yarning circles, workshops, on-Country visits)?</p> <p>How will inclusivity and accessibility be ensured?</p>
Venue	<p>Is it accessible, culturally appropriate and conducive to effective communication and relationships?</p>
Resources	<p>Materials, equipment, catering</p>
Payments	<p>Have you planned for the payment for Cultural Advice?</p>
Timing	<p>Does it respect Aboriginal peoples' availability and cultural practices (e.g., Sorry Business, seasonal activities)?</p>
Potential risks	<p>What are potential challenges (e.g., conflicts, emotional distress)?</p> <p>What mitigation strategies are in place?</p>
Expected outcomes	<p>What are the goals and intended outcomes?</p> <p>How will you work with the community to co-design these goals?</p>
Closing the loop and follow-up	<p>How will feedback be documented and used?</p> <p>How will you report back to participants?</p>
Approval	<p>Name and signature of approving manager.</p>

Note: In the rare instance where a project team determines that engagement with Aboriginal communities is not required, a written justification should be prepared and approved by a Director. This ensures transparency, accountability, and alignment with the expectations of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy.

Where delivery is led by external agencies (e.g., due to statutory or funding reasons), staff should still seek to ensure Caring for Country principles are upheld, and engagement is respectful and aligned with this Framework.



Activity checklist

This checklist guides staff through the Effective Relationships Process using the *Think, Plan, Prepare, Connect, Evaluate* framework, ensuring effective, meaningful, and respectful interactions with Aboriginal communities.

1. Think

Understand the purpose

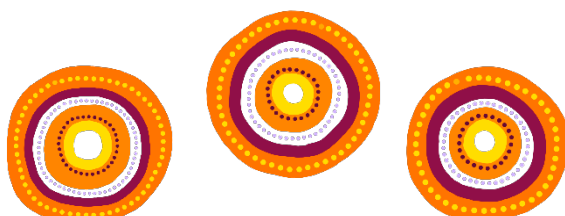
- Is this activity necessary? Why?
- Have you worked with the community to define the outcomes you're hoping to achieve for DPHI and the community?
- What are the key skills or experience needed for yourself, other staff and any consultants or facilitators you might need?

Know the Community

- Have you identified the key contributors and participants - Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal organisations, youth, etc?
- Have you researched and considered the particular cultural, historical, and social contexts of the community?
- Are there any previous or current land-claims or significant developments in the area?
- Is other government or major private sector engagement occurring with the community or in the area?
- Have you made time to walk on Country ahead of the relationship-building activities?
- Have I taken time to listen to past feedback and insights from community before shaping this activity?

Assess risks

- Are there potential sensitivities (e.g., disputes over boundaries or past conflicts)?
- Do you have a plan to mitigate psychological and cultural safety risks?





2. Plan

Define the scope

- Have you considered the level of activity required -Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower? You should generally aim for collaboration or empowerment -in line with co-development principles -unless there is a clear reason why another level is more appropriate.
- Are you clear on key messages and information that needs to be shared?

Set objectives and metrics

- Have you considered what success looks like? And how it will be measured?

Select participants

- Have you considered who needs to be involved to ensure representation and inclusivity?
- Have you considered appropriate payment rates and processes?
- Have you considered using [Supply Nation](#) to identify certified Aboriginal-owned businesses and consultants who could contribute to this activity?

Choose the format

- What is the best approach (yarning circle, workshop, survey, etc.) for this audience and purpose?
- Have I built in opportunities for active listening (e.g., yarning, informal conversations)?

Determine logistics

- Where and when will the activity take place?
- Are the chosen dates and venues culturally appropriate and accessible?
- Have you kept the community central to decision-making on logistics?

3. Prepare

Gather resources

- Have you prepared the necessary materials (e.g., agenda, yarning sheets, maps)?
- Have you considered appropriate payment rates and processes for Aboriginal participants as part of planning and budgeting?
- Are your resources culturally appropriate and easy to understand?



Consult internally

- Have all internal people been briefed?
- Is there alignment with CPCP Objectives, DPHI policies and the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy?

Establish cultural safety

- Are protocols in place to ensure participants feel safe and respected?
- Have you considered aspects like men's and women's business, sorry business, or other cultural sensitivities?
- Have you checked if people are comfortable meeting together or individually?
- Am I mentally and culturally prepared to listen without judgement or rushing to respond?

Coordinate logistics

- Have travel arrangements, accessibility needs, and catering been organised?
- Is there a plan for compensating participants for their time and knowledge, where applicable?

4. Connect

Foster a respectful environment

- Am I prioritising listening over presenting or persuading?
- Have you considered an appropriate Acknowledgement of Country or Welcome to Country?
- Do you have a plan for inclusive and respectful language throughout the activity?

Facilitate effectively

- Have you engaged an appropriate facilitator?
- Will the facilitation encourage open dialogue and active listening?
- Are mechanisms in place to ensure questions and concerns are responded to transparently and honestly?





Document and record

- Are you prepared to take notes or recordings with participants' consent?
- Have you ensured any ICIP (Intellectual and Cultural Property) this is used or shared will be managed respectfully?

Adapt as needed

- Have you considered how you can be as flexible and responsive as possible to aid the flow of the discussion?

5. Evaluate

Gather community insights

- Are you confident that participants will feel heard and respected?
- Are you prepared to collect community input about the process itself?

Reflect on outcomes

- Have considered how to assess and measure co-developed outcomes against objectives?
- How will you capture insights or actions emerging from the session?

Share learnings

- Have you considered how learnings and outcomes can be incorporated into this Framework and/or your project?
- Do you have plans to communicate back to participants and "close the loop"?

Plan for improvement

- Are mechanisms in place to capture what worked well and what could be improved for future activities?





Protocols for meetings with Traditional Custodians

This section of the Toolkit provides guidelines for engagement meetings with Traditional Custodians to ensure cultural respect and safety, transparency, and effective communication. These protocols aim to uphold best practices, mitigate risks, and safeguard the integrity of relationships between the Department and Aboriginal communities.

These protocols align with the NSW Government Sector Core Values and the NSW Public Service Code of Ethics and Conduct, which outline expectations for professional behaviour, integrity, respect, and accountability in all interactions with Aboriginal communities. They build on the Department's ongoing cultural capability commitments and broader Caring for Country engagement. They are intended as a practical, easy-to-use guide for all staff and consultants involved in meeting with Traditional Custodians.

The aim is not only to support respectful conduct, but to foster long-term, meaningful relationships.

Looking for the 'why' behind these protocols?

The Framework sets out the cultural, ethical and policy rationale for these engagement protocols. This Toolkit helps you apply them in practice.

Meeting preparation and notification

- **Advance notice:** Traditional Custodians must be advised in advance of who will be attending the meeting, including names, roles, and affiliations. This demonstrates transparency and cultural respect and helps prevent discomfort caused by unexpected attendees. Sharing this information early helps set the tone for open, honest conversations.
- **Pre-meeting briefing:** All Department staff and consultants must familiarise themselves with background information on the community, key issues, and any previous engagements to ensure culturally appropriate conduct.
- **Agenda and purpose:** Where possible, an agenda should be provided before the meeting, outlining discussion topics, and expected outcomes.



Meeting conduct and cultural protocols

- **Acknowledgment and thanks for being on Country:** Meetings should begin with an Acknowledgment of Country, delivered by the most senior government representative or a designated participant. Where appropriate and agreed with Traditional Custodians, a Welcome to Country may also be arranged. Thanks should always be given to Traditional Custodians for meeting on their Country.
- **Introductions:** At the start of every meeting, all attendees should be introduced by name, role, and organisation to establish clarity and accountability.
- **Cultural sensitivity and respect:** All participants must conduct themselves with cultural awareness and professionalism, ensuring that:
 - Traditional Custodians are given the opportunity to lead discussions on cultural matters.
 - Active listening is practiced, and no one interrupts or dominates the conversation.
 - Complex bureaucratic language or jargon is minimised for clarity.
- **Power balance and inclusivity:** Meetings should be structured to ensure Traditional Custodians do not feel outnumbered or overwhelmed by government representatives.
- **Adherence to the NSW Public Service Code of Ethics and Conduct:** All Department staff and consultants must comply with the NSW Government's ethical framework, ensuring interactions uphold integrity, respect, accountability, and service.
- **Cultural capability training:** staff should undertake this ahead of engagement.

Managing unforeseen issues

- **Addressing inappropriate behaviour:** If a participant acts disrespectfully or disruptively, facilitators should immediately address the issue and, if necessary, remove the individual from the discussion.
- **Conflict resolution:** If conflicts arise, facilitators should acknowledge concerns, seek clarification, and ensure all voices are heard respectfully before moving forward.





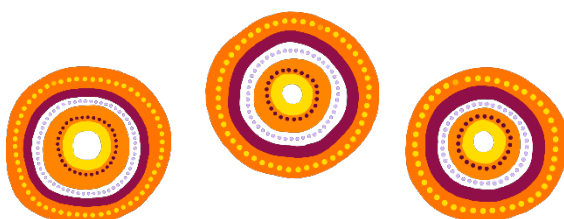
Post-meeting follow-up

- **Meeting summary:** A summary of key discussion points and agreed actions should be prepared within a reasonable timeframe after the meeting.
- **Feedback loop:** Traditional Custodians should be given an opportunity to provide feedback on the engagement process to ensure continuous improvement.
- **Ongoing relationship building:** Engagement should be part of a long-term commitment rather than a one-off consultation. Regular check-ins and updates should be provided where appropriate.
- **Responsibility for implementation:** It is the responsibility of the lead project officer or team engaging with Traditional Custodians to ensure these protocols are followed and documented. This includes assigning roles for follow-up and ensuring feedback mechanisms are in place.

Compliance and accountability

- All Department staff and consultants are expected to adhere to these protocols. Any breaches of engagement standards should be reported and addressed to maintain trust and professionalism in all interactions with Traditional Custodians.

Alignment with the NSW Public Service Code of Ethics and Conduct: All engagement should reflect the core values of integrity, trust, service, and accountability as outlined in the Code.





Understanding Aboriginal cultural concepts

Understanding and respecting Aboriginal culture specific to Western Sydney is essential for effective relationships that underpin the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy. Below is a list of some key cultural concepts, along with brief explanations that can help guide respectful and effective interactions.

Caring for Country

Caring for Country is a foundational concept in Aboriginal cultures. It is much more than 'land management' or 'biodiversity conservation'. It encompasses the spiritual, cultural, and practical responsibilities of managing land, water, and resources sustainably. It reflects connection to Country, where land is not just a physical space, but a living entity imbued with stories, spirits, and ancestors. For Aboriginal peoples, Caring for Country involves practices like cultural burning, sustainable harvesting, and the protection of sacred sites, ensuring the health of ecosystems and the continuity of cultural traditions.

Show respect and support by recognising Traditional Custodians' leadership and integrating their knowledge into conservation efforts. Caring for Country is

also about reconciliation; it's about healing relationships between people, land, and culture, fostering mutual respect and collaboration.

Connection to Country

Aboriginal peoples have a profound spiritual and cultural relationship with the land, known as "Country." Country encompasses not just the physical landscape but also the people, plants, animals, stories, and creation spirits associated with it. This connection influences identity, responsibilities, and well-being. Recognising this bond is crucial; activities and connections should honour and incorporate the significance of Country to Aboriginal communities.

Speaking for Country

Only certain individuals have the cultural authority to speak for specific areas of Country. These custodians hold knowledge and responsibility passed down through generations. Engaging with the appropriate representatives is vital to ensure cultural protocols are respected. Identifying and consulting with these individuals should be a priority.



Sometimes there will be disputes over who can speak for Country. In circumstances like this, it is important to approach the situation with sensitivity and impartiality. Focus on listening to all perspectives, maintaining neutrality, and seeking guidance from respected community members who may assist in clarifying cultural authority or help you navigate the uncertainty. Prioritise fostering dialogue and trust while avoiding actions that might deepen divisions.

Sorry Business

Sorry Business refers to mourning practices and ceremonies following a death in the community. This period is deeply significant, involving various cultural rituals and obligations. Activities may need to be postponed or adjusted to accommodate Sorry Business, as community members may be unavailable during this time.

Men's and Women's Business

Certain cultural knowledge, practices, and ceremonies are gender-specific, known as Men's Business or Women's Business. These traditions dictate that some information and activities are exclusive to men or women. Activities should respect these distinctions by ensuring appropriate gender representation and sensitivity during consultations.

Aboriginal decision-making

Decision-making in Aboriginal communities often involves collective consultation and consensus. Elders and community leaders play pivotal roles, and decisions are made with consideration of the community's well-being and cultural obligations. Allowing time for internal discussions and respecting the community's process is essential for genuine connection and relationship-building.

The Dreaming

The Dreaming refers to the foundational spiritual beliefs and creation stories of Aboriginal cultures. It explains the origins of the world, the relationships between people, animals, and the land, and sets out laws and moral codes. Understanding the significance of the Dreaming can provide deeper insight into cultural values and perspectives. Dreamings are also used as another term for Totem.

Kinship systems

Aboriginal kinship systems are complex social structures that determine Aboriginal relationships, responsibilities, and social behaviour. They influence obligations, roles, and decision-making across community life. Recognising and accepting kinship systems helps in understanding community dynamics and communication pathways.





Totems

Totems are natural entities, such as animals, plants, or features of the landscape, that hold spiritual significance for individuals, families, or groups. Sometimes also referred to as Dreamings, totems are inherited and link people to their Country, ancestors, and Dreaming stories. They have collective and individual roles. A person may have personal totems, family totems, and clan totems, each representing different layers of connection and responsibility. Totems often hold ceremonial importance, ensuring continuity of cultural knowledge. They represent a person's connection to the natural world and carry responsibilities to protect and respect that entity.

For example, a person whose totem is the kangaroo may have specific cultural responsibilities to ensure the wellbeing of kangaroo populations and their habitats. Similarly, a family with a river or fish as a totem may hold traditional knowledge about managing water systems. Respecting these connections is critical during connections with communities, as totems are deeply embedded in cultural identity and environmental stewardship.

Skin names

Skin names are an integral part of many Aboriginal kinship systems. They are a form of social classification that determines a person's relationships, responsibilities, and roles within their community. Unlike surnames in Western culture, Skin names are not family names but part of a broader kinship structure. They define a person's position within the community and their relationships to others, including who they can marry, who they are responsible for, and who they are prohibited from interacting with in certain ways.

Lore and Law

"Lore" refers to the customs and stories that govern Aboriginal societies, while "Law" encompasses formal rules and sanctions. Both are integral to maintaining social order and cultural integrity. Be mindful of these traditional 'legal' frameworks and their contemporary relevance.





Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a fundamental principle in Aboriginal cultures, emphasising mutual exchange and the importance of giving back. Demonstrating reciprocity can build trust and show respect. This might involve sharing information, providing support, or ensuring that benefits from projects are shared with the community.

Recognition should be specific, transparent, and where possible include attributions of knowledge sources or case studies led by communities. An ICIP statement should accompany all publications that include Traditional Knowledge.

Bush tucker, bush food, and bush medicine

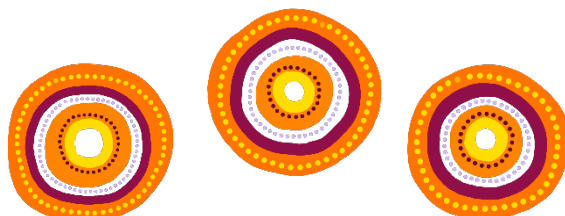
Bush tucker, bush food, and bush medicine are integral to Aboriginal cultural heritage. They reflect knowledge of Country and sustainable practices developed over tens of thousands of years. Bush tucker and bush food encompass native plants, fruits, seeds, and animals used for food, while bush medicine involves traditional healing practices using natural resources including plants, animals, and resins. These practices are tied to cultural identity, spiritual beliefs, and community well-being. We should respect the sacred and ecological significance of these traditions, ensuring they are honoured and incorporated into caring for Country and sustainability efforts where appropriate, always guided by cultural protocols and permissions.

Engagement fatigue

Many people in Aboriginal communities experience fatigue from frequent consultations, especially previous engagements that have not led to tangible outcomes. To mitigate this, ensure that each activity is purposeful, coordinated with other agencies when possible, and that community perspectives are acted upon and communicated back to the community. Payments for cultural advice services also assist in mitigating and offsetting the impacts of engagement fatigue.

It's important not to use “engagement fatigue” as a reason to avoid engagement altogether. Instead, we must find ways to create the right conditions for Aboriginal people to contribute - such as combining engagement activities, allowing adequate time, and compensating people fairly for their time and expertise.

By understanding and integrating these cultural considerations, the Department staff can foster respectful, effective, and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal communities, ensuring that initiatives under the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy are culturally informed and supported.





Cultural safety

Cultural safety is about Aboriginal peoples feeling respected, valued, and secure. It goes beyond cultural awareness, focusing on the experiences of Aboriginal participants and ensuring they feel their identity, knowledge, and contributions are honoured. In Aboriginal communities, cultural safety can also be influenced by internal dynamics, such as community conflict, identity politics, and historical grievances. These factors can make individuals feel vulnerable, even within their

cultural group. Ensuring cultural safety requires understanding these complexities and fostering spaces where diverse voices can be heard without fear of judgment or exclusion.

This means being aware of power dynamics, facilitating neutral spaces for dialogue, and respecting community-led approaches to resolving conflict. By prioritising cultural safety, we can build trust, support healing, and create meaningful opportunities for collaboration, ensuring that all participants feel their perspectives are valued.

Government is not responsible for resolving long-standing community disagreements. Engagement should prioritise respectful, inclusive processes that create safe spaces and avoid silencing any voice





How to be a good cross-cultural ally

Being a good cross-cultural ally is not only the right thing to do but also makes for more effective relationships. Within the Framework, being a good cross-cultural ally means supporting and amplifying Aboriginal voices while respecting their knowledge, histories, and self-determination. Allies foster trust, honour cultural heritage, and ensure Aboriginal voices are central to decision-making. Allies do their very best to incorporate Aboriginal voices in their work, and advocate for the inclusion of Aboriginal voices and knowledge more broadly.



Understanding Country and people

Being a good ally begins with recognising that Country is a living entity. Acknowledging its significance to Aboriginal peoples means understanding its role as a source of identity, sustenance, and spirituality. Respecting the people of the land — both Traditional Custodians and other Aboriginal communities — is foundational to effective allyship.



Histories and realities

Allies educate themselves on the histories of colonisation, dispossession, and survival. These realities inform current challenges, including socio-economic inequities and environmental degradation. Recognising the resilience of Aboriginal communities is essential for meaningful relations.



Supporting self- determination

True allyship requires supporting self-determination, ensuring that Aboriginal peoples have the authority and resources to lead decisions affecting their lives and Country. Allies amplify Aboriginal voices rather than speaking for them.



Seeing and valuing

Good allies see and value the diverse knowledge systems, skills, and perspectives Aboriginal peoples bring. This includes traditional ecological knowledge, innovative approaches to conservation, and the cultural practices that sustain communities and ecosystems alike.



Bridging and innovating together

Cross-cultural collaboration involves bridging gaps in understanding and co-creating solutions. Allies can support Aboriginal-led initiatives, fostering innovation that blends traditional and contemporary approaches. This partnership approach strengthens both communities and ecosystems.

Being a good cross-cultural ally requires humility, respect, and a commitment to learning. By building relationships grounded in trust and reciprocity, allies can help ensure a sustainable and equitable future for Country and all who depend on it.



Acknowledgement of Country guidance

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity to show respect for Aboriginal Traditional Custodians and their enduring connection to the land. On the Cumberland Plain, where Darug, Dharawal, and Gundungurra peoples hold custodianship, personalising and contextualising your acknowledgement makes it more authentic and meaningful.

Given the absence of formal agreement or consensus on borders between and within different Aboriginal Nations, this guidance also provides practical advice for navigating such disputes respectfully.

Tailoring your acknowledgement

Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians by name, where appropriate, and consider linking your words to the purpose of the meeting or event, the values of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy, or the broader work of the Resilience and Sustainability Division.

- **Personalise:** Share a personal connection or gratitude for the land you are on, where you were born or where you live.
- **Contextualise:** Relate the acknowledgement to the activity or discussion taking place.
- **Be authentic:** Avoid formulaic or generic language; focus on sincerity and respect.

Sample acknowledgements

1. Connection to purpose

“As we gather today to discuss our efforts in caring for Country on the Cumberland Plain, I would like to acknowledge the Darug people as the Traditional Custodians of this land. Their enduring connection to this place and their care for it inspires the work we do today, as we seek to integrate their knowledge and values into our shared vision for healthy Country, people, and communities.”

2. Personal and localised

“I have lived and worked on Dharawal Country for many years. I’d like to thank the Dharawal people for their generosity in sharing this land, their wisdom, and their cultural heritage. As we meet today to discuss this important work, we honour their on-going connection to this place and their role in its care.”



3. Inclusive and respectful

“I would like to acknowledge the Darug, Dharawal, and Gundungurra peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the Cumberland Plain. I would also like to recognise the diversity of connections to this land, including those of other Aboriginal families and communities who now call this place home. Today, we come together to listen, learn, and work collaboratively in caring for Country. To those of you who have been looking after it for millennia, thank you for having us.”

Navigating disputes over Custodianship

The absence of formal agreements on the borders of Darug, Dharawal, and Gundungurra Country requires sensitivity and respect. While it is important to name Traditional Custodians, in locations for meetings where identities and responsibility for Country might be disputed, avoid making definitive statements about boundaries or exclusivity.

Instead:

Acknowledge complexity: Recognise the diversity of perspectives and connections to Country.

Use inclusive language: Recognised and Include “Traditional Custodians” and broader Aboriginal communities who live on the Cumberland Plain and contribute to its care.

Avoid Alienation: Do not attempt to resolve or take sides in disputes; focus on inclusivity and respect.

Example acknowledgement for disputed areas:

“I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land and recognise the long history and diversity of connections that Aboriginal communities have to this place. We pay our respects to all Elders past and present and honour their enduring connection to and care for Country.”





Practical tips

- * **Preparation:** If unsure about the appropriate Custodians to acknowledge, consult with Aboriginal cultural advisors or local Aboriginal organisations.
- * **Cultural sensitivity:** Be prepared to adapt your acknowledgement if you are corrected or provided with additional information about the appropriate Custodians or protocols. Acknowledge the correction and incorporate the guidance into future connections.
- * **Gratitude and respect:** Focus on expressing genuine thanks for the opportunity to meet and work on Aboriginal land.

By tailoring your acknowledgements to the context, showing respect for the diversity of connections to Country, and acknowledging disputes with care, your words will reflect both cultural sensitivity and authenticity. This approach helps foster trust and respect, which is essential for meaningful relations with Aboriginal peoples on the Cumberland Plain.

Yarning Circle Guidance

A Yarning Circle is a traditional Aboriginal method of communication and storytelling, used to foster open and respectful dialogue. Participants sit in a circle, symbolising equality and connection, and take turns speaking without interruption.

Yarning Circles are particularly effective for culturally sensitive discussions, community consultations, and group decision-making. They create a safe space for diverse voices to be heard, encourage active listening, and promote a collective approach to problem-solving or learning. This method is ideal for engaging with Aboriginal communities in a culturally respectful and meaningful way.

The Framework outlines the importance of culturally appropriate engagement methods, including yarning. This Toolkit provides practical guidance on how to design and facilitate effective yarning circles.





You can follow these guidelines to ensure respectful and effective use of Yarning Circles.

1. Purpose & Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define the purpose of the Yarning Circle and ensure it aligns with cultural practices.• Consult Elders or cultural advisors to guide and support the session.
2. Setting the scene	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choose an appropriate location, ideally on-Country or a culturally significant site.• Arrange seating in a circle to promote equality and inclusivity.• Begin with a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country.
3. Facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a respected and experienced facilitator, ideally an Elder or cultural advisor, to guide the discussion.• Encourage active listening and ensure all voices are heard.• Use culturally appropriate language and avoid jargon.
4. Cultural Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respect cultural protocols, such as Men's and Women's Business.• Be mindful of emotional or traumatic topics and provide support if needed.
5. Closing the Circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summarise key points and outcomes.• Acknowledge participants' contributions and thank them for their time.• Offer an opportunity for reflection or follow-up discussions.
6. Follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document insights and share them respectfully with participants.• Ensure actions based on the discussion are followed through and communicated back.





Youth relations

Caring for Country Youth Relations Plan

Resilience and Sustainability Division has developed a Youth Relations Plan to guide meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal youth aged 16–30 in Caring for Country work across the Cumberland Plain. This Plan outlines how youth can be supported and encouraged to contribute their knowledge, perspectives, and leadership to caring for Country efforts.

The focus is on inviting youth into existing structures and activities, building a youth network, and supporting access to programs such as the Caring for Country Youth Traineeship. The approach includes options for participation in the Caring for Country Working Group, collaboration with councils and LALCs, and outreach through schools, ranger programs, and digital platforms.

The Plan also outlines a future vision for a formal Caring for Country Youth Forum which can be established once there is greater institutional readiness and awareness.

Why Youth are important

Aboriginal youth play a critical role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of cultural practices and caring for Country. Connecting with youth as part of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy and the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan is vital for:

Cultural continuity: Empowering youth to carry forward the knowledge, values, and practices of their Elders ensures that cultural heritage remains alive and relevant.

Environmental stewardship: Youth bring fresh perspectives and energy to addressing environmental challenges and can become powerful advocates for caring for Country.

Leadership development: Involving youth in decision-making builds their confidence, skills, and capacity and employability to engage in and lead future caring for Country initiatives.

Intergenerational knowledge transfer: Engaging youth fosters the sharing of traditional knowledge from Elders to younger generations, blending it with contemporary practices for innovative solutions.

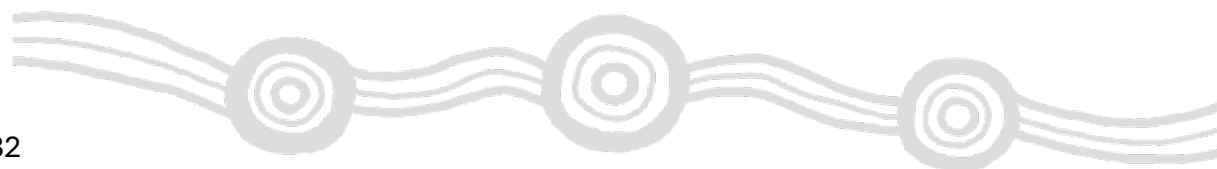
This emphasis on youth is reflected in the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy, which includes a specific commitment to amplify youth voices and increase their participation in projects and decision-making across the Cumberland Plain. Supporting youth to build knowledge and confidence is an investment in the long-term sustainability of Country, culture and community.



Best practice principles for connecting with youth

The following best-practice principles apply to building effective relationships with Aboriginal youth:

						
Cultural Safety	Relatability	Inclusivity and Accessibility	Youth-led and Empowering	Reciprocity and Mutual Respect	On-Country Connection	Sustainability
Create a respectful environment where youth feel valued and free to express their perspectives.	Connect with youth in ways that feel relevant, approachable, and authentic.	Ensure youth from diverse backgrounds, including those not formally recognised as Traditional Custodians, can participate.	Encourage youth to take leadership roles in forums and activities.	Recognise and compensate youth for their contributions, valuing their knowledge and time.	Host activities in culturally significant locations to strengthen ties to Country and enhance the experience	Establish mechanisms, like revolving membership, to ensure continuity and fresh perspectives.
Address sensitivities around identity and community conflict with care and understanding.	Be open to their styles of communication, interests, and cultural expressions.	Remove barriers to participation, such as travel or financial constraints.	Provide opportunities for decision-making and co-design of initiatives.			





Psychological safety and self-care

Engaging with Aboriginal communities, particularly in the context of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy and the significant development pressures on the Cumberland Plain, can be rewarding but also challenging. Intergenerational and contemporary trauma experienced by many Aboriginal communities, combined with the high stakes and intensity of discussions about land use and cultural heritage, can create emotionally charged situations. Ensuring psychological safety for yourself, other staff and consultants is essential for effective and respectful relationships, and it's a legal right for everyone in the workplace.

Recognising the challenges

Psychological safety means creating an environment where you feel supported, respected, and free from harm during your work. This includes addressing:

Emotional impact: Listening to stories of trauma, dispossession, and cultural loss can be emotionally taxing, especially for those who empathise deeply.

Conflict situations: High tensions may arise between or within communities, or between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, creating stressful or volatile interactions.

Challenging dynamics: Staff may encounter hostility or resistance stemming from mistrust of government processes or frustration with past relations.

Strategies for ensuring psychological safety

1. Preparation:

- * Ensure you and other staff have undergone cultural competency and conflict management training to prepare for complex or difficult discussions.
- * Develop a clear plan for managing potential conflict or distress, including de-escalation strategies and safety protocols.
- * Brief yourself and other staff on the community context, including any known sensitivities, grievances, or dynamics that may arise.

2. Creating safe spaces:

- * Ensure settings are neutral, inclusive, and conducive to respectful dialogue.
- * Use skilled facilitators who can manage emotionally charged conversations and de-escalate tensions when needed.
- * Clearly define and enforce behavioural expectations for all participants, including staff and community members.



3. Self-care for staff:

- * Set personal boundaries, such as taking breaks during lengthy or emotionally intense situations.
- * Access Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or counselling services to help process challenging experiences.
- * Foster a team culture of mutual support, where colleagues can share experiences and strategies for resilience.
- * Sequence consultations with adequate breaks to ensure recovery.

4. Managerial and organisational support:

- * Ensure managers check in regularly with you and other staff to gauge well-being.
- * Create debriefing opportunities to reflect on challenges, successes, and lessons learned.
- * Provide flexibility in work schedules following particularly demanding or distressing situations, allowing time for recovery.

5. Conflict management:

- * Equip yourself and other staff with techniques to defuse tense situations, such as active listening, empathy, and redirecting conversations.
- * If conflict escalates, ensure you know how to safely exit the situation or involve higher-level support.
- * Collaborate with cultural advisors or Elders to mediate disputes when appropriate.

Building resilience and support systems

- * **Recognise burnout risks:** Regularly assess workloads and emotional demands to prevent burnout or compassion fatigue.
- * **Celebrate successes:** Acknowledge the positive outcomes, reinforcing the value of staff and community contributions.
- * **Invest in training and development:** Equip staff with ongoing opportunities to build resilience and confidence in their roles.

By prioritising psychological safety, self-care, and organisational support, staff can engage more effectively and sustainably with Aboriginal communities. This ensures that the challenges of building relationships do not overshadow their potential to foster trust, collaboration, and better outcomes for the Cumberland Plain.





Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) refers to the rights of Aboriginal peoples to protect their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and cultural expressions. This includes stories, songs, dances, art, ceremonies, languages, ecological knowledge, and sacred sites. Respecting ICIP is essential to ensuring that Aboriginal communities maintain control over their cultural heritage and are not subjected to misuse or exploitation of their knowledge or cultural expressions.

This section provides practical steps for managing ICIP, particularly to ensure consistency with and adherence to the [NSW Government's Aboriginal Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol](#) and Department's own ICIP Protocol.

Key principles for managing ICIP

1. Cultural authority and agency

Aboriginal people have the cultural authority to decide how their ICIP is used, shared, or represented. Engage with the appropriate custodians or knowledge holders to ensure that cultural authority is respected.

2. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

Always obtain FPIC before collecting, using, or sharing any ICIP. This means providing clear, accessible information about the intended use of the material and allowing communities to make decisions freely and without pressure.

FPIC is also only one important safeguard. Remember ongoing consent, Indigenous-led governance, and broader principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty are also essential.

3. Integrity and representation

Ensure that cultural knowledge is accurately represented and remains true to its source. Avoid misinterpretation, distortion, or inappropriate usage of cultural elements.

4. Attribution and benefit sharing

Aboriginal peoples should be appropriately acknowledged for their contributions, and any benefits derived from their cultural knowledge or expressions should be shared fairly with the community.



Practical steps for managing ICIP

1. Managing shared cultural knowledge during consultations

- **Set clear boundaries:** Before consultations begin, clearly explain how you plan for the information to be shared, recorded, stored, and used. Obtain consent from participants, outlining specific purposes for the use of cultural knowledge.
- **Confidentiality agreements:** Where sensitive or sacred information is shared, establish confidentiality agreements to protect the knowledge. Ensure participants feel safe to share without fear of misuse.
- **Cultural advisors:** Engage cultural advisors or Elders to provide guidance on what knowledge can be shared publicly and what must remain protected.

Example: If community members share a Dreaming story linked to a specific site, confirm whether this story can be included in reports or if it should remain confidential.

2. Managing photographs, videos, and recordings

- **Consent for media use:** Always seek permission before taking photographs, videos, or recordings during consultations. Explain how the media will be used, stored, and shared.
- **Contextual information:** Ensure images and recordings are accompanied by context to avoid misrepresentation. For instance, captions should include the names of individuals or groups, and any associated cultural significance.
- **Restricted use:** Some images or recordings may be culturally sensitive and unsuitable for public dissemination. Follow the guidance of community leaders to ensure that usage aligns with cultural protocols.

Example: A photograph of a cultural ceremony might require consent from multiple custodians before publication, and its use may need to be limited to specific educational or cultural contexts.

3. Handling ecological and land-based knowledge

- **Acknowledging ownership:** Ecological knowledge about Country, such as traditional caring for Country practices or the location of sacred sites, is part of ICIP and must be treated with respect.



- **Shared agreements:** Develop agreements that outline how ecological knowledge will be integrated into planning or conservation efforts and how Aboriginal communities will benefit from its use.
- **Protection mechanisms:** Avoid sharing sensitive knowledge about sacred or culturally significant sites beyond those directly involved in the project.

Example: Cultural burning practices shared during a consultation should be documented only with permission and credited to the appropriate custodians. The community's role in implementing such practices should be prioritised.

4. Documentation and storage of ICIP

- **Secure storage:** Ensure that all collected ICIP, including written materials, recordings, and images, is stored securely, and accessed only by authorised personnel.
- **Transparency:** Inform communities about where and how their knowledge is stored and how they can access it if needed.
- **Regular review:** Periodically review stored materials with the community to ensure that permissions remain current, and knowledge is being managed appropriately.

Example: A report containing cultural site information should be stored in a secure database and shared only with project teams who have explicit permission to access it.

5. Reporting back to Communities

- **Close the loop:** Share outcomes and updates with the community, showing how their contributions influenced decisions or projects.
- **Co-develop materials:** When possible, co-develop public-facing materials (e.g., educational resources or reports) with the community to ensure cultural accuracy and alignment with their preferences.
- **Recognise contributions:** Publicly acknowledge community input in reports, presentations, or other outputs, ensuring proper attribution.

Example: When developing a conservation plan, include a section acknowledging the Traditional Custodians whose knowledge informed the work and share the final draft for their review.

By embedding these practices into their activities, staff can ensure that ICIP is respected, managed ethically, and aligned with Aboriginal communities' rights and aspirations. This approach fosters trust, collaboration, and meaningful outcomes that honour Aboriginal cultural heritage.



Recommended meeting places

Meeting places are more than just physical locations; they set the tone for effective relationships and reflect respect for Aboriginal culture and comfort. For meaningful and productive conversations, the choice of meeting location should prioritise the needs and preferences of the participants, especially Aboriginal communities and participants that might have accessibility needs. Wherever possible, meetings should take place in culturally significant spaces, outdoors on-Country, or in locations that are familiar and accessible to the community.

Thematic and generalised suggestions

1. Outdoors and on-Country

Meeting outdoors, particularly on-Country, provides a culturally appropriate and grounding environment. Sitting under a tree, by a waterway, or near other natural landmarks can foster relevance and connection to the land and to the discussions at hand.

2. Participant-suggested locations

Always consult with the people or communities you are meeting about their preferred location. This ensures the space is accessible, comfortable, and meaningful to them.

3. Familiar and Community-centric spaces

For Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) or other organisations, holding meetings in their offices can ensure ease of participation and respect for their role, time, and resources.

Neutral spaces such as cafes, art galleries, or community centres can provide a relaxed and informal setting for individuals or smaller groups.

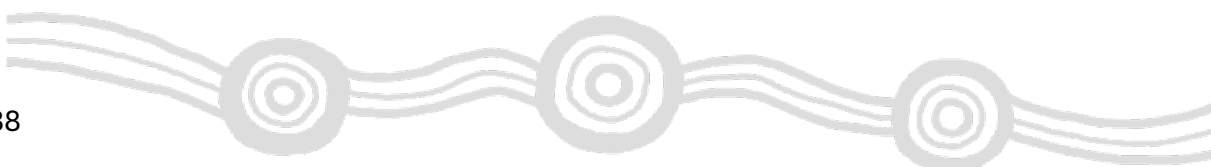
4. Culturally significant venues

Venues that celebrate Aboriginal culture and history, such as cultural centres or botanic gardens, create a meaningful backdrop for discussions.

Some recommended locations on the Cumberland Plain

1. [Muru Mittigar Cultural Education Centre](#) (Darug Country)

Located at Rouse Hill, Muru Mittigar provides is a Darug cultural centre with indoor and outdoor facilities, making it ideal for workshops, consultations, or informal meetings.





2. [Mt Annan Botanic Gardens](#) / Yandel'ora (Dharawal Country)

Known as Yandel'ora, this is a traditional meeting place of the Dharawal people who have invited other nations onto their lands here for thousands of years. There is a café for small informal gatherings and meeting rooms at the National Seed Bank for larger and more formal meetings.

3. [Campbelltown Arts Centre](#) (Dharawal Country)

The Arts Centre's outdoor café and accessible location make it a practical and meaningful setting.

4. [Nurragingy Reserve](#) (Darug Country)

This is an ideal location for informal or small group meetings on-Country. It also has a functions centre for larger gatherings.

5. [Yellomundee Regional Park](#) (Darug Country)

Culturally significant to the Darug people, this is a National Park next to the Nepean River and provides a good on-Country location.

6. [Stone Quarry Creek Railway Viaduct](#) (Dharawal Country)

Located at the end of Picton Avenue, this park has lots of shade and a nice atmosphere on-Country by the River.

Practical tips for choosing a meeting location

- * **Seek Community guidance:** Ask the participants where they would feel most comfortable meeting. This could be a preferred location on-Country, a café, their office, or a familiar community space.
- * **Cultural significance:** Choose spaces that resonate with the cultural identity of the Traditional Custodians and other participants.
- * **Accessibility:** Ensure the location is easy to reach and meets the physical needs of all attendees.
- * **Atmosphere:** Consider the type of meeting -informal conversations may work well in a café or park, while workshops may require a more formal venue.

By being thoughtful and inclusive in suggesting and selecting meeting places, staff can foster environments that are welcoming, culturally appropriate, and conducive to productive, respectful, and meaningful relationships.





Aboriginal organisations and networks

Below is an updated list of Aboriginal organisations and networks relevant to the Cumberland Plain. Each plays a role in supporting cultural heritage, environmental stewardship, or community well-being, making them potential partners in the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy.

While we have done our best in seeking approval for each organisation to be listed here, please treat them with care and respect.

Darug organisations

[Muru Mittigar](#) cultural hub on Darug Country that provides education and cultural experiences.

[Darug Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation](#) (DNAC) preserves and promotes Darug culture through education and community initiatives.

[Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation](#) (DCAC) advocates for Darug heritage and cultural knowledge, offering guidance on heritage management.

[Darug Strategic Management Group](#) (DSMG) focuses on Darug cultural preservation and consultation in conservation and education projects.

[Merana Aboriginal Community Association](#) (MACA) provides advocacy and education for Aboriginal peoples in the Hawkesbury region, celebrating Darug heritage.

Dharawal organisations

[Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation](#) offers cultural, health, and community services to support Dharawal peoples.

Cubbitch Barta Native Title Claimants Aboriginal Corporation, led by Aunty Glenda Chalker, represents Dharawal native title interests and advocates for the protection of cultural heritage.

[Dharawal Knowledge Holders](#) shares and protects Dharawal cultural knowledge, led by Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews, Aunty Francis Bodkin, and Uncle Gavin Andrews.

[Wori Woolywa](#) managed by Dharawal man Daniel Chalker provides cultural fire and other caring for Country services.

Dharawal Indigenous Rangers engage in conservation and cultural caring for Country on Dharawal Country.



Gundungurra organisations

Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association Inc (GAHAI) protects Gundungurra heritage and offers guidance on cultural and environmental conservation.

[Dingo Darbo](#) is a Gundungurra network led by Uncle David King, focusing on preserving cultural knowledge and managing Country.

Kazan Brown is a Gundungurra leader and heritage advocate involved in cultural consultation and preservation efforts.

Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs)

[Deerubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council](#) represents Aboriginal cultural and land interests across the Deerubbin area.

[Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council](#) advocates for cultural, environmental, and community development for Gandangara Aboriginal peoples.

[Tharawal Local Aboriginal Land Council](#) focuses on cultural education and caring for Country initiatives on Dharawal Country.

Other relevant organisations

[YARPA Hub](#) is an NSW Aboriginal business and employment network fostering opportunities and cultural connections.

The [Blue Mountains Cultural Centre](#) (Gundungurra and Darug Country) provides a space to celebrate Aboriginal art and culture, ideal for community meetings.

[Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre](#) (Dharawal Country) is an arts hub showcasing Aboriginal art and offering spaces for dialogue and collaboration.

[Campbelltown Arts Centre and Café](#) (Dharawal Country) combines cultural exhibitions with a relaxed setting, making it an ideal for informal meetings.

Most of the nine local Councils on the Cumberland Plain have Aboriginal community engagement teams or positions. These people are usually strongly linked into local Aboriginal communities and can provide invaluable advice.

This list highlights the diverse and invaluable contributions of Aboriginal organisations and networks to the Cumberland Plain. Engaging with these groups can help strengthen partnerships and ensure cultural respect and collaboration.





Calendar of significant events

Recognising and participating in key cultural and historical events is essential to building relations, connecting with community, and fostering respect and understanding of Aboriginal cultures.

Below is a calendar of significant days or festivals relevant to the Cumberland Plain and its communities. Many Aboriginal community organisations and local councils organise community events on these days. These represent an opportunity for grass-roots informal connection.

Survival Day (26 January) is a day to acknowledge the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures in the face of colonisation.

National Apology Day (13 February) commemorates the formal apology to the Stolen Generations, recognising the impact of past government policies.

National Close the Gap Day (March) focuses on health equity and addressing gaps in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Cooee Festival (March) is a vibrant celebration of Aboriginal culture and heritage in Western Sydney, featuring art, music, storytelling, and cultural workshops that highlight the rich traditions of the Darug and other Aboriginal peoples.

Appin Massacre Memorial (April) is a memorial to remember the adults and children killed in the 1816 Appin Massacre, an important moment for reflecting on the impacts of colonisation.

National Sorry Day (26 May) acknowledges the Stolen Generations and the ongoing impact of these policies on Aboriginal families and communities.

National Reconciliation Week (27 May–3 June) promotes reconciliation and stronger relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Mabo Day (June 3) celebrates the landmark High Court decision that recognised native title and the rights of Aboriginal peoples to their land.

NAIDOC Week (First full week of July) is a week celebrating the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day (August 4) focuses on the rights and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.



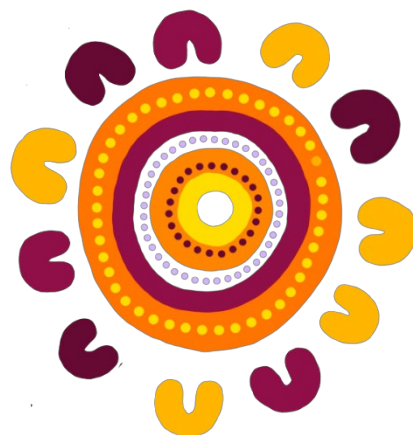


International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples (August 9) recognises the contributions and rights of Indigenous peoples globally.

Western Sydney Parklands Gabrugal Yana Bushwalk (Date varies) features Aboriginal art installations representing the Darug seasonal calendar, providing a cultural and environmental learning opportunity.

NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout Carnival (October long weekend) brings together communities across NSW for a significant sporting and cultural event.

Participating in these events and initiatives demonstrates respect and builds relationships with Aboriginal communities, helping align efforts with the cultural values and priorities of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy.





Caring for Country relationships matrix

This relationships matrix (Table 1) is designed to help staff determine the appropriate level of relationship-building required for a particular activity and identify the skills and resources needed to support that level. It recognises that not all interactions are the same and that stronger, more collaborative relationships require deeper capability, cultural understanding, and shared leadership.

The matrix outlines a progression from *Inform* to *Empower*, with each level reflecting an increasing depth of trust, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. The Division should be aiming for connection at either the *Collaborate* or *Empower* levels.

The relationships matrix draws on concepts from the [IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation](#) - a widely used mainstream model that outlines levels of community involvement from *Inform* to *Empower*. While there are clear alignments, our Framework centres Aboriginal ways of working, where relationships, trust, and respect are foundational - not optional.

In Aboriginal cultures, decisions follow from connection and mutual understanding, rather than preceding them. This shifts the focus from participation alone to shared responsibility, reciprocity, and walking together over time.

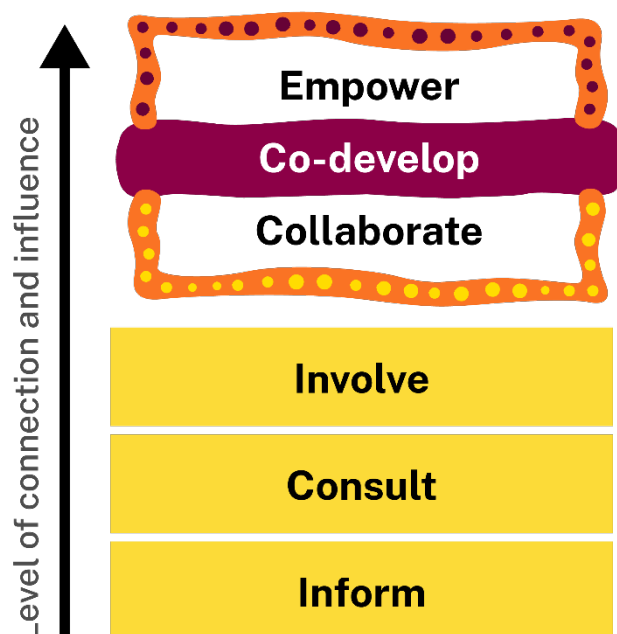




Table 1. Relationships matrix

Connection level	Core capabilities	Practical application	Example activities
Inform	<p>Clear and concise communication.</p> <p>Knowledge of the Strategy and relevant policies.</p> <p>Cultural sensitivity</p>	<p>One-way information sharing, ensuring the message respects cultural values.</p> <p>Creating newsletters or fact sheets</p>	<p>Delivering presentations to community members or other relevant people and organisations.</p> <p>Newsletters.</p>
Consult	<p>Active listening.</p> <p>Cultural humility.</p> <p>Ability to ask open-ended questions.</p> <p>Respect for diverse opinions.</p>	<p>Gathering input and experiences shared to inform decisions, while being transparent about how input will be used</p>	<p>Conducting surveys or focus groups.</p> <p>Consultations with LALCs and Traditional Custodians.</p>
Involve	<p>Facilitation and mediation skills.</p> <p>Ability to incorporate what we heard from communities.</p> <p>Managing diverse perspectives.</p>	<p>Connecting throughout the process to ensure community perspectives are reflected in the outcomes.</p>	<p>Hosting yarning circles.</p> <p>Co-developing workshops with community representatives.</p>
Collaborate	<p>Project co-design and management skills.</p> <p>Building mutual trust.</p> <p>Conflict resolution.</p>	<p>Working in partnership, sharing decision-making responsibilities.</p>	<p>Co-developing Caring for Country plans with Traditional Custodians.</p> <p>Jointly planning on-Country initiatives.</p>
Empower	<p>Advocacy for community-led initiatives.</p> <p>Supporting self-determination.</p> <p>Capacity building</p>	<p>Enabling Aboriginal communities to lead, providing resources and decision-making authority to achieve their goals.</p>	<p>Funding and supporting community-led conservation projects.</p> <p>Facilitating governance structures for Aboriginal leadership.</p>

Note: This capability matrix has been informed in part by the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum and methodology. It has been adapted to suit the specific relational and cultural context of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy.



Guide for using the matrix

1. Understand the context of connecting

Determine the purpose of the activity: Are you sharing information, seeking input, or collaborating on decisions?

Identify the relevant participants, such as Traditional Custodians, Local Aboriginal Land Councils, or other community groups.

2. Choose the appropriate connection level

Match the relationship-building level to the project's goals and the needs of the community.

Use the Practical Application column to understand what is expected at each level.

3. Assess your current capabilities

Evaluate whether you or your team have the necessary skills for the chosen level.

Identify gaps and seek support or training as needed.

4. Plan connection activities

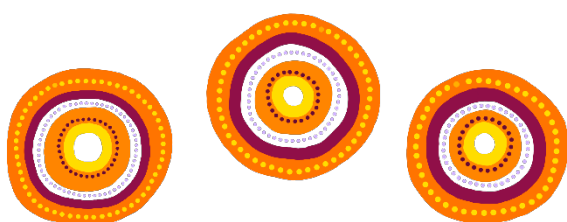
Use the five-step Think, Plan, Prepare, Connect, Evaluate process, and the Example Activities column to design strategies that align with the chosen level.

Ensure activities are culturally appropriate and respectful of community protocols.

5. Reflect and improve

After the relationship-building activity, assess whether intended outcomes were achieved.

Gather what we heard from participants to improve future connections.





Selecting capable consultants

This guidance outlines desired skills, experience, and attributes of consultants, facilitators, or project partners who might be engaged to support delivery of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy. It is designed to help staff preparing briefs or selecting culturally capable partners for caring for Country-related activities.

Core capabilities and experience

Consultants should demonstrate:

- Strong relationships or cultural connections with Traditional Custodians and/or Aboriginal communities of the Cumberland Plain.
- Proven experience in delivering projects on caring for Country.
- Cultural competence and humility in working with Aboriginal peoples, with demonstrated understanding of protocols, governance structures, and community diversity, particularly at the local context.
- Strong facilitation and listening skills, particularly for yarning circles, workshops, or community meetings where cultural safety is essential.
- Knowledge of Aboriginal decision-making processes and how these differ from Western planning or engagement approaches.
- Familiarity with the goals and values of the Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy and the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan –informed by the local Aboriginal community and with a commitment to embedding Aboriginal voices, knowledge, and leadership in project outcomes.

Values and behaviours

- Approaches work with respect, patience, and humility.
- Shows commitment to long-term relationships, not just short-term deliverables.
- Collaborates openly with departmental staff and is willing to step back to support Aboriginal leadership.
- Respects local variation in language, terminology, and community dynamics.

Aboriginal identity is strongly preferred, particularly when lived cultural knowledge and local connections support community trust and culturally grounded outcomes, but it is not essential and should not override the importance of demonstrated cultural competence, local experience, and a values-based approach aligned with caring for Country.

[Supply Nation](#) is Australia's largest Indigenous Business Directory and lists certified Aboriginal-owned businesses and is a good place to start in looking for Aboriginal consultants. Industry colleagues with direct experience in engagement with Aboriginal communities will, of course, also be invaluable.



Further reading

Aboriginal Participation Strategy: The Strategy focuses on building strong, respectful partnerships with Aboriginal peoples, communities and organisations. It aims to make sure Aboriginal people have equal access to all Department services by placing their needs, values and lived experiences at the centre of how services are designed and delivered. The strategy supports meaningful engagement and helps create lasting, positive outcomes. This work is intrinsically linked with the Department's **Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2025-28** that sets a unifying vision to deliver better outcomes in partnership with Aboriginal peoples, communities and entities across NSW.

Caring for Country Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy: The foundational policy guiding relations with and outcomes for Aboriginal communities on the Cumberland Plain.

NSW Government Architect's Connecting With Country Framework: Provides guidance on embedding Aboriginal perspectives into the planning, design, and delivery of projects by fostering genuine relationships with Country and its First Peoples.

The Recognise Country: Guidelines for Development in the Aerotropolis: Outlines practical steps for incorporating Aboriginal knowledge, values, and connection to Country into planning and development processes in Western Sydney, with a focus on cultural recognition and design.

Australian Human Rights Commission Principles for Effective Consultation and Engagement: Outlines key principles for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, focusing on respect, inclusion, and transparency.

AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research: Provides ethical guidelines for research and connection with Indigenous communities, emphasizing respect for Indigenous knowledge systems.

The Upstream Kit: Offers tools and ideas for transforming urban planning by centring Country, culture, and community, with a strong focus on Aboriginal worldviews and relational approaches to engagement.

Our Culture Our Future: This comprehensive report laid the foundation for the recognition and protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights in Australia. It remains a key reference for policy-makers, legal professionals, and organisations engaging respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture.



The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is an international framework that affirms the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination, cultural heritage, and decision-making about their lands and waters - including the right to be actively involved in policies and projects that affect them.

NSW Family and Community Services Aboriginal Consultation Guide: A practical guide for respectful consultation with Aboriginal communities, developed by NSW Family & Community Services.

A Framework for Working Effectively with Aboriginal People: Outlines strategies for collaboration and relations within NSW's health context.

Working with Aboriginal People and Communities: A Practice Resource: A practical guide developed by the NSW Department of Community Services for working with Aboriginal communities.

Engaging Indigenous Communities in Natural Resource Management: Guidelines by the Australian Government for involving Indigenous communities in environmental and caring for Country efforts.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Toolkit: A toolkit by the Australian Human Rights Commission for effective community engagement.

Yurirka: Proppa Engagement with Aboriginal Peoples: Guidelines for respectful engagement protocols, developed by the University of South Australia.





