

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols



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## Cultural protocols principles

Cultural protocols refer to the customs, lore and codes of behaviour of a particular cultural group and away of conducting business.

The purpose of this guide is to provide Benevolent Society's staff with background information and guidance on appropriate word usage when incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and ceremonies into official events or paying respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This guideline provides basic information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols, and offers suggestions on how these protocols can be:

- **Observed in community activities and interactions;**
- **Incorporated into your events and activities' and**
- **Adopted in organisation policies, practices, research and consultation activities and projects.**

## Our Innovate RAP Plan 2019-2021

Our new Reconciliation Action Plan outlines the actions we will take to facilitate Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

It provides a framework to ensure our services and employment practices are culturally sensitive and accessible and will make a valuable contribution to the collective efforts of The Benevolent Society's Reconciliation efforts.



# Respect

The Benevolent Society recognises that strong and enduring relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples require a deeper understanding and engagement that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families and communities as the primary beneficiary of our efforts. We will;

- **Provide continuous cultural learning opportunities to increase understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements.**
- **Actively acknowledge and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and achievements and encourage our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to participate in cultural events and respect the cultural traditions, history and diversity of communities in the locations in which we work.**

## What are Cultural protocols?

Cultural protocols are suggested rules or guidelines. A protocol tells us how to treat and work with people in a respectful and useful way. Cultural protocols also refer to procedures used to guide the observance of traditional knowledge and practices, including how traditional knowledge is used, recorded and disseminated.

Ceremonies and protocols are an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Ceremonies such as **'Welcome to Country'** and **'Acknowledgment of Country'** recognise the unique position and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australian cultural history. The Benevolent Society's Reconciliation efforts with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples aims to achieve reconciliation through the development of productive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, mindful that the approach will be diverse depending on the location of the community. There are remote communities, communities in regional towns and in major cities, and each must be recognised as culturally distinct.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are among the oldest living cultures in the world and are a vital part of Australia's identity. Acknowledging and celebrating this rich history, and the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that continue to this day, are key elements of Benevolent Society's Reconciliation Action Plan.



# Performing Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country

Performing Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country ceremonies is an important way of demonstrating cultural respect and builds staff cultural competency.

## Welcome to Country

Welcome to Country is where an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodian or Traditional Owner (in most cases an Elder), or a senior representative welcomes people to their land.

This is a significant recognition and is made through a formal process. Welcome to Country should always occur in the opening ceremony of the event conducted by someone recognised by the local community as having the authority to do so.

Welcome to Country may consist of a single speech by the representative of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, or include a performance which will vary according to region and location. Performances can include a Traditional Welcoming Song, a Traditional Dance, a didgeridoo performance or other musical performances, or a combination (according to region and location).

## Acknowledgement of Country

Acknowledgement of Country is an occasion for anyone to show respect for the Traditional Custodians of country in a place of meeting or gathering. The Benevolent Society Acknowledges the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Benevolent Society's E-Signature is a guide for staff in doing an Acknowledgement.

*"The Benevolent Society acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia (e.g. Place- Lismore) and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (e.g. People-Bundjalung) continued connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging on the lands on which we work and live."*

**If in doubt about Place and People, ask!**



# Information sheet

It is important for The Benevolent Society to consider cultural protocols before engaging with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues or people from a local community will be able to assist you in finding out which specific protocols you need to consider. If there is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation/s in the community you will be engaging with, contact them and ask who you should be talking to and what the appropriate protocols are.

Below is a list of some common protocols in engaging with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community\*. Remember, these are just examples, and protocols will vary significantly for different communities and cultures.

**Protocols for introductions are important describing who you are and where you are from.**

**Be patient when asking questions.**

**Remember that different families may have different values and cultural beliefs, even if they are from the same community**

**In some communities, direct eye contact may be accepted, however in other communities it may be considered offensive.**

**The use of silence should not be misunderstood. It may mean that people do not want to express an opinion at that point in time, or they could be listening and reflecting on what you have said.**

**Do not force a point of view. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities have knowledge that may differ from yours. Remember you are consulting them to seek their knowledge and opinions.**

**Use language that respects the integrity and beliefs of the family or community members with whom you are meeting.**

**Avoid jargon and do not use acronyms.**

**Consult with a variety of community people.**

**Are you aware of protocols that exist in your local area?**

**Who could you approach to ask and learn about protocols?**

\*SNAICC Creating Change Through Partnerships Training Manual

## Further reading

<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Welcome-to-and-Acknowledgement-of-Country.pdf>

<https://www.google.com.au/sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=15&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjEuL7n8fAhVNFHIKHRTDzAQfjAOegQIABAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.pmc.gov.au%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Fpublications%2FCommunicating-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Audiences>

