



STANDING
STRONG
TOGETHER

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability overview

Cultural capability is a broad term that encompasses cultural awareness, cultural safety and cultural competence.

This information sheet forms part of a wider collection of resources Act Belong Commit have developed to support schools in being culturally responsive. These resources include classroom and whole-school resources, such as posters, templates and information on how schools can provide culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety is an environment which is safe for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience.

Cultural safety is about individuals, organisations and systems being aware of the impact of their own culture and cultural values on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, while creating and maintaining an environment where all people are treated in a culturally respectful manner.

Strategies for achieving a culturally safe school environment

- Include a Welcome to Country for major school events (e.g. graduations, NAIDOC events and athletics carnivals).
- Include an Acknowledgment of Country at major events if a Traditional Custodian is unavailable to deliver a Welcome to Country. Include an Acknowledgment of Country at smaller events (e.g. assemblies and staff meetings).
- Have an Acknowledgement plaque at the entrance to the school that acknowledges the Traditional Owners of your area.
- Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags around the school.
- Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art around the school, including in the office or as murals on school walls.
- Participate and educate your school community on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander celebrations and commemorations, including NAIDOC Week, National Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week.
- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language by using Aboriginal animals or seasons to name school factions, buildings or classrooms. It is recommended to consult a local Elder to ensure the correct language group is being used.
- Promote and provide opportunities for school staff to develop their understanding and respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and how to use culturally responsive teaching practices.
- Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, perspectives and culture in the classroom through videos and books.

Welcome to Country vs. Acknowledgement of Country

It's important to understand the difference between a **Welcome to Country** and **Acknowledgement of Country**, who can do them, and when it's appropriate to use in an event, ceremony, function or meeting.

A Welcome to Country is a ceremony delivered by a local Aboriginal person of significance (usually an Elder) to acknowledge and give consent to events taking place on their traditional lands.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be a way of showing awareness of, and respect for, the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which a meeting or event is taking place. Its purpose is to recognise the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country, and is commonly delivered by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Welcome to Country

What is it?

A ceremony to acknowledge and give consent to events taking place on traditional Aboriginal lands.

Who can give it?

A local Aboriginal person of significance (usually an Elder).

When is it appropriate?

Major events, forums, functions and ceremonies.

When should it occur?

At the opening of the event as the first item on the program.

What form can it take?

Varies from speeches, in language or English, to dance, song and ceremonies or a combination.



Acknowledgement of Country

A way of showing awareness of, and respect for, the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which a meeting or event is taking place.

Commonly delivered by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Major events if a Traditional Custodian is unavailable to deliver a Welcome to Country, or at smaller events/meetings.

At the beginning of an event, or in response to a Welcome to Country.

Speech or written as part of email signatures, featured on websites and signs at the entrances of buildings.

Adapted from [Reconciliation NSW](#)

[Download larger version \[PDF\]](#)

Context and Acknowledgement of Country

Some contextual factors may influence whether an Acknowledgement of Country is necessary.

For example, hosting a regular staff meeting in your school that includes an Acknowledgement plaque would not require a verbal Acknowledgement of Country.

However, it would be appropriate to do an Acknowledgement of Country for a formal meeting when external guests are present.

Additionally, if a Welcome to Country is delivered it would be appropriate for the Master of Ceremonies or the next speaker to provide a direct response and thank you on behalf of the event/ceremony organisers and those in attendance. An Acknowledgement of Country or further follow-up is not required from other guests or speakers.

Acknowledgement of Country useful tips

An Acknowledgement of Country should recognise the Traditional Owners of the land on which you're meeting on or presenting from. If you weren't born where you're doing an Acknowledgement of Country, you may also wish to Acknowledge the First Nations people from where you were born.

Within Western Australia, there are at least 93 different cultural groups, with over 250 across Australia. Each of these groups speak a different language, and some have different cultural practices. As a result, different groups may prefer being referred to by different terms. It is important to know how to identify these cultural groups.

The **AIATSIS's language map** is a useful tool to help ensure you are using the preferred language, as well as knowing the Traditional Custodians for the land you are meeting, presenting or teaching on.

It is essential you genuinely believe in what you are saying during an Acknowledgement of Country, and are aware of its purpose. A personalised, heartfelt Acknowledgement of Country will provide more meaning to both you and the audience. This can involve incorporating what you personally feel connected to, including nature. It also provides an important opportunity to model how to connect and show respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture for students, families and staff.






Use of respectful and correct terminology

Be sure not to abbreviate, and to use correct capitalisation when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Terms such as **Country**, **Traditional Owners** and **Elders** should also be capitalised.

Appropriate terminology when referring to First Nations People include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Indigenous people, Aboriginal people, Indigenous Australians, or First Nations People. Whilst all these terms are correct, ensure you are consistent with the terminology you use.

Acknowledgement of Country examples and templates

Refer to the following resources for further information on how to write a meaningful Acknowledgement of Country, and templates for both an Acknowledgement of Country script and plaque:

-  [Acknowledgement of Country examples](#)
-  [Acknowledgement of Country template \(written script\)](#)
-  [Acknowledgement of Country plaque template](#)
-  [Department of Education's Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Protocols](#)
-  [Reconciliation Australia Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country](#)

Additional helpful websites

There are many great websites that provide a range of valuable information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, culture and perspectives, including:

-  [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural capability - Victorian Public Sector Commission](#)
-  [Australians Together](#)
-  [AIATSIS](#)
-  [Koori Curriculum](#)
-  [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education](#)
-  [AITSL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education](#)
-  [Australian Curriculum Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures \(Version 8.4\)](#)
-  [Magabala Books](#)