National Disability Services (NDS) WA respects and values Aboriginal culture, and is committed to ensuring that Aboriginal people with disabilities, their families and carers have access to culturally responsive information, supports and services.

This manual has been compiled to assist disability services to build their capacity to understand and develop culturally responsive services.

‘For Indigenous peoples to participate in Australian society as equals requires that we be able to live our lives free from assumptions by others about what is best for us. It requires recognition of our values, culture and traditions so that they can co-exist with those of mainstream society. It requires respecting our difference and celebrating it within the diversity of the nation.’

Dr William Jonas

Aboriginal people’s cultural experiences may range from traditional communities living from the land, to an urban situation (living in the city) or anywhere between these two extremes. This resource is generalised and needs to be considered as a guide rather than mandatory for working with all Aboriginal people.

Please Note: the term “Aboriginal” is used in preference to “Indigenous” in this manual as Indigenous refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is an international term adopted by the United Nations to identify all Indigenous peoples in a global context.

The term Aboriginal people is also used to reflect the diversity of languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs of the different Aboriginal groups or nations within Western Australia.

Acknowledgements

The principal authors of this report are Helen Slater and Rod Garlett Aboriginal Senior Policy Officers, National Disability Services. The contribution of Jim Morrison and Rhonda Murphy are also greatly appreciated.

Other acknowledgements include

- Disability Services Commission
- Training and Workforce Development WA
- Kooya Consultancy
- Department of Indigenous Affairs

For further information about this resource contact
NDS WA  9208 9802 www.nds.org.au/wa
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Resource

This resource is designed to assist you to work effectively with Aboriginal people by enhancing your knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal Australians. It has been written as a guide for non-Aboriginal workers to promote culturally sensitive practices.

Aboriginal people, despite higher rates of disability, are generally underrepresented in disability services. Similarly, there tends to be low rates of employment of Aboriginal people in the disability sector.

This resource aims to promote better understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture. It will guide services in developing strategies to address and compensate for the social disadvantage experienced by Australia’s First People.

1.2 Using the Resource

“Working with Aboriginal People” has been designed to be used as a resource for staff education and service development.

The resource can be used by individuals or worked through by staff teams.

1.3 Structure of the Resource

The resource has five sections.

Section 1 provides an introduction to the resource, and a brief background to its development.

Section 2 provides information about the diversity of Aboriginal culture. It outlines some important values and concepts important to Aboriginal People.

Section 3 outlines current legislation aimed at protecting the rights of Aboriginal People.

Section 4 provides some of the past mistreatment and how this has impacted on Aboriginal People.

Section 5 provides information and strategies that may be helpful when engaging with Aboriginal People.

Section 6 provides information and an example of an Aboriginal Employment Strategy

Section 7 provides appendices including other resources that may be of interest to the reader.

4.4 Glossary of Terms

**ABORIGINAL:** A person who is of Aboriginal descent, who identifies as an Aboriginal, and is accepted by the Aboriginal community as such.

**TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER:** A person who is of Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as a Torres Strait Islander and is accepted by the Torres Strait Islander community as such.

**TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND:** Aboriginal people who have been able to maintain close links with their land, customs, ceremonies and traditions within an environment.

**CULTURE:** Culture is referred to as human behaviour which is learned in a social environment. Systems developed as human groups adapt to their environment, a way of life for groups of people.

**NUCLEAR FAMILY:** One set of parents and their children, living independently in their residence, being economically independent and having limited contact with other family members.

**EXTENDED FAMILY:** Consist of a bigger unit and is extended through cousins, uncles, aunties and close friends.

**KINSHIP:** A structure used for social relations, personal family connections, responsibility and behaviour expectations.

**ELDERS:** Elders are respected members of the Aboriginal community. They are identified leaders and their wisdom is relied on by their community. They may be responsible for passing down knowledge from generation to generation.

**MEN’S BUSINESS:** Issues which have a male perspective within Aboriginal culture.

**WOMEN’S BUSINESS:** Issues which have a female perspective within Aboriginal culture.
2. CELEBRATING DIFFERENCE

Tolerance of cultural differences when working with cultural minority groups has been part of State and Federal government policy in recent years. Truly effective work with people from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups comes with respectful acknowledgement and celebration of these differences, rather than mere tolerance.

The differences in cultural backgrounds of individuals are what make the cultural fabric of a society rich.

Social justice is about making sure that every Australian – Indigenous and non-Indigenous – has choices about how they live and the means to make those choices. It also means recognizing the distinctive rights that Indigenous Australians hold as the original peoples of this land. Source: Human Rights Commission

2.1 Diversity of Aboriginal Communities

Each Aboriginal community is different, with different customs and protocols, systems of organisation, languages, and relationships to each other. There is no single Aboriginal culture – Aboriginal society is very diverse. Aboriginal culture is dynamic and continuously evolving.

Torres Strait Islanders are a separate group with their own distinct identity and cultural traditions.

Significant issues in the cultural identity of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people include family and kinship; recognition and respect as a distinctive people; relationship to land, sea and preservation of customs, laws and language.

The number of living languages still used in Aboriginal Australia is a testament to the diversity of communities. Over 200 languages have been identified as recently operating. Sadly, in some areas the language is dying with the Aboriginal elders. However, over 120 languages are still in use today. Language use is very sophisticated, with a system of languages or dialects that are used by each community. Languages that are not quite as detailed are used for travel within regions. Many Aboriginal people, particularly in remote areas, are multilingual – some speaking as many as 11 different languages.

Some communities, usually in urban areas and regional centres, are made up of people from different traditional communities. This can cause some tensions, and needs to be considered when working with Aboriginal people.

2.2 Cultural Values

The following values are central to Aboriginal culture. They influence the way Aboriginal people live and how they interact with others.

- **Family** – including extended family are a high priority.
- **Shared Responsibility** – each person is required to be responsible in one area or another. If this role is neglected it becomes automatic for another member of the family or extended family to ‘fill in’.
- **Acceptance** – each individual is understood for both their strengths and weaknesses.
- **Sharing** is seen as part of Aboriginal peoples responsibility, it is an honour.
- **Equality** – each person is respected with the ‘right’ to be an equal
- **Belonging** to your people, your land and your ‘rights’ are of utmost importance.
- **Ownership** is a shared experience.
- **Land** gives us a complete sense of belonging.
- **Respect** for one’s positions and responsibilities in all areas.
- **Time Orientation** – Aboriginal people often focus on the past and present rather than on the future. With the attitude of ‘live for today’, and not for tomorrow.
- **Person Orientation** – human relationships and interactions are valued. Material gain may have little or no interest.

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4 Source: Madafferi, R. Aboriginal Culture Handbook Resource for Non-Aboriginal People Caring for Aboriginal Children. Produced by Aboriginal and Islander Congress of W.A.
2.3 Country
The concept of ‘country’ is fundamental to Aboriginal culture.

“Land is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. The land is not just soil or rocks or minerals, but a whole environment that sustains and is sustained by people and culture. For Indigenous Australians, the land is the core of all spirituality and this relationship and the spirit of ‘country’ is central to the issues that are important to Indigenous people today”.

The area where Perth now stands was called ‘Boorloo’, by the Aboriginal people living there at the time of first contact with Europeans, in 1827. Boorloo formed part of Mooro, the tribal lands of the Yellargonga, one of several groups based around the Swan River and known collectively as the Whadjuk. The Whadjuk were a part of 14 tribes which formed the southwest socio-linguistic groups known as the Noongar (The People or meaning man), also called the Bibbulmun.

“Much trouble has come from people forgetting the land, the spirit. Many people are sick and have lost their spirit. The white government has cut their culture; we grieve for them. But we can all learn and make our spirit strong. My teaching is about opening your spirit, working together to build understanding. Opening our way, opening our hearts to share the spirit of the land with all who want to learn.”

Nganyinytja is an elder of the Pitjantjatjara people of Central Australia.

2.4 The Importance of Family
Aboriginal families including extended families, tend to have strong relationships and responsibilities. Aunties and Uncles have similar roles and responsibilities as birth parents. The extended family share in the upbringing of children.

The closeness of the extended family can be such that the death of a cousin or uncle could carry the same impact as the death of a brother or father. Any family loss or breakdown is likely to impact on an individual, the family, the extended family and the community in general. Allowances must be made for an appropriate time of mourning.

For many Aboriginal people, after a death the deceased persons name is no longer used.

6 Source: http://www.yoni.com/cronef/nganyinytja.shtml
Australia has legislation to make sure that every Australians rights are protected. This legislation also includes recognising the distinct rights that Aboriginal Australians hold as the original people of this land. There are a number of State and Federal Government Acts of Parliament that govern socially responsible and equitable behaviour towards all members of Australian society.

This legislation includes:

- Commonwealth *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986*;
- Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*;
- Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*;
- West Australian *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*; and
- West Australian *Disability Services Act 1993*.

**Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986** - makes it unlawful to discriminate in the provision of goods and services – including employment, training and related services – against someone on the basis of their sex, marital status, pregnancy, race, religious or political convictions, impairment, age, medical record, criminal record, sexual preference or trade union activity. It also outlaws sexual and racial harassment.

**Racial Discrimination Act 1975** - protects against unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin and other unlawful conduct such as racial hatred. It covers areas including employment; provision of goods and services; right to join trade unions; access to places and facilities; land, housing and other accommodation. Complaints must be in writing. It is then assessed and if within jurisdiction is investigated. The complaint is then reviewed to see if it should be terminated or if it is suitable for conciliation. If the complaint cannot be conciliated, it will be terminated by the President of the Commission. A complainant may then take the matter to the Federal Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Court.

**Disability Discrimination Act 1992** - grounds of unlawful discrimination include physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, neurological or learning disabilities; physical disfigurement; disorders, illness or diseases that affect thought processes, perceptions of reality, emotions or judgement, or results in disturbed behaviours; presence in body of organisms causing disease or illness (eg HIV virus). It covers areas such as employment; education; access to premises; accommodation; buying or selling land; activities of clubs; sport; administration of Commonwealth laws and programs; provision of goods; and services and facilities. Complaints must be in writing. It is then assessed and if within jurisdiction is investigated. The complaint is then reviewed to see if it should be terminated or if it is suitable for conciliation. If the complaint cannot be conciliated, it will be terminated by the President of the Commission. A complainant may then take the matter to the Federal Court of Australia or the Federal Magistrates Court.

**Equal Opportunity Act 1984** - has similar provisions outlawing discrimination based on many of the characteristics noted above, including age, race, colour, and national or ethnic origin.

**Disability Services Act 1993** - an Act for the establishment of the Disability Services Commission and the Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability, for the furtherance of principles applicable to people with disabilities, for the funding and provision of services to such people that meet certain objectives, for the resolution of complaints by such people, and for related purposes.
Acknowledgement of past mistreatment of Aboriginal people was finally articulated by the Australian Government in February 2008 when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology motion was been tabled in Parliament.

‘Today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment.

We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations – this blemished chapter in our nation’s history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say sorry.

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say sorry.

We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where this Parliament resolves that the injustices of the past must never, never happen again.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.
A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.
A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.'

4.1 Past Legislation that has Impacted on Aboriginal People

Past legislation is a reflection of the social attitudes of the time. A continuous history of legislation affecting the rights of Aboriginal people as human beings has negatively influenced access to education, health, career development, employment, and cultural cohesiveness. It has also had a devastating psychological and emotional impact on many Aboriginal people.

Terra Nullius – Latin, for empty land or land not occupied by humans. Terra Nullius gave the right of a people to claim land on behalf of a nation or kingdom if it was not already owned or inhabited.

1829 – Foundation of Western Australia
Under British Colonial law Aboriginal People became subjects of the Crown, entitled to protection under British Law.

1830 - Fisheries and Wildlife Act
Aboriginal People considered “vermin” and came under this act. This ensured legal claim to Terra Nullius.

1840 – Colonial government issues direction that Aboriginal People should not be admitted to town areas.

1873 – An Act was passed to regulate employment of Aboriginal People including the prohibition of employment of Aboriginal Women.

1875 – The Act was amended prohibiting Aboriginal People from being employed without a permit. It also included rights to execute condemned Aboriginal prisoners.

1886 – Aboriginal Protection Board established. Powers enabled regulation and control over the entire Aboriginal population in Western Australia including rations, shelter, supervised reserves, and contract employment only. JP’s had the power to deem who was considered Aboriginal.

1897 – Aborigines Protection Act. The Creation of the Aborigines Department (same as the Aborigines Protection Board) and a Chief Protector was appointed.

1902 – Criminal Code Act. Increased authority to punish Aboriginal People, males could be sentenced to be whipped and public executions of Aborigines were lawful. These provisions were not abolished until the 1963 Criminal Code Amendment.

1905 - Aborigines Act and amendments made to the act in 1936 granting increased powers.

1936 - Native Administration Act.
This gave the Chief Protector statutory power to institute strict measures controlling Aboriginal People. The act gave the Chief Protector absolute authority over Aboriginal People’s lives. The act legalised the taking of Aboriginal Children away from their parents and gave the Chief Protector legal custody over every Aboriginal Child 16 years of age or younger (1905 act) and then 21 years of age or younger as the act was amended in 1936. Segregation was also sanctioned under this Act.
1944 - Natives Act. Certificate of citizenship
In order to claim the benefits of this Act you had to completely dissolve all tribal and Aboriginal associations, serve in the Armed Forces and pass a medical. Aboriginal People had to prove they had adopted a *civilised* life for at least two years. Such citizenship could be dissolved at any time.


1960 - Aboriginal People became eligible for Commonwealth benefits, pensions and allowances on the same basis as non-Aboriginal people, *unless they were considered “nomadic or primitive”.*

1965 - Federal Pastoral Industry Award Amendment (sanctioned - 1968): theoretically providing for Aboriginal People to receive the same rate of pay as non-Aboriginal People.

1972 - Formation of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority. “Start of the concept of self determination.”
The immutable right to self determination has still not been established. Self determination is a fundamental human right under international law.

The concept of self determination is an important part of the Indigenous struggle for economic, social and cultural rights in Australia today. The *Bringing them home* report recommended that “self determination should be recognised for all Indigenous communities”.

1972 - Formation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission ATSIC.

1980 - The Noonkanbah controversy. The state government assumed rights to override the Heritage Act legislation, allowing mining exploration over areas of cultural significance to the Yungngora people at Noonkanbah in the Kimberley.

1980 - WA “Children in Limbo Report”. Commissioned by the Department of Community Welfare, observes that Aboriginal Children account for 57% of all children in care. Two thirds of those children had been placed with non-Aboriginal care-givers.

4.2 Issues arising from past mistreatment
In Western Australia the most harmful of these legislations was arguably the **1905 Act**. This Act was designed to improve the lives of Aboriginal people, however, the outcome was to increase state control and establish what is now termed “welfare dependency”. It is interesting to note that this particular legislation was designed by a man named Roth who had just completed writing similar legislation in Queensland to “control the native problem”. After designing the 1905 Act in Western Australia he went to South Africa where he was engaged in the design of legislation in that country that was known as ‘apartheid’.

So began a long and tragic history of the attempted destruction of a culture. This involved the removal of children and the establishment of missions with a focus on education. Ironically, this education was only up to the level of Grade 3 as it was believed that Aboriginal people could not be educated beyond this point.

Aboriginal people proved to be a ready workforce and were used (payment was in flour, sugar, tea and maybe occasionally a little meat) as station workers and labourers. Women were employed as domestics in the houses of wealthy land owners. The use of Aboriginal languages and cultural practices were banned and children were removed. As Aboriginal culture is an oral culture the loss of language and the removal of children should have been the end of the culture. However small pockets of resistance remained and fortunately all was not lost.
Those Aboriginal people who had lived closest to the colonised city centres were initially the most affected by this cultural destruction. Today there are many people who have been disconnected from their cultural identity and continually ask the question “who am I?” and ‘where do I fit in’. Commonly, this confusion and emptiness can result in “a spiral of despair” and lead to alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, crime, abuse and violence.

In 1967 the Australian people had a referendum to change two sections of the constitution concerning the treatment of Aboriginal people. Until the referendum Aboriginal people were not citizens of the country but categorized as “flora and fauna” and not counted in the census. The referendum changed this and Aboriginal people were now Australian citizens with similar rights as other citizens. It has only been 43 years since this landmark referendum.

Many Aboriginal people have learned to adapt and live in two worlds - a cultural family driven Aboriginal community and contemporary Australian society. This sometimes requires a switch from one cultural identity to another. This is testament to the adaptability and strength of Aboriginal people, as they maintain their Aboriginal cultural identity whilst living and working in contemporary Australian society. This is a remarkable journey of a people that in just over 200 years have evolved from a hunter gatherer society to a diverse contemporary community.

The cultural disintegration caused by past mistreatment has had a devastating effect on many communities, families and individuals. Most Aboriginal people will have someone in their extended family who was taken away.

While many Aboriginal people have access to a good standard of living and positive life experiences, too many experience unacceptable levels of disadvantage in living standards, life expectancy, education, health and employment. Current data shows a significant gap in these critical areas between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent 2.5 of the Australian population. Some important differences between the Indigenous population and other Australians are:

- The Indigenous population grew at 12.8 per cent from 2001 to 2006, nearly double the rate of the total population (6.6 per cent). This trend is likely to continue.
- The total fertility rate for Indigenous women (2.4 babies per woman) is considerably higher than the fertility rate for all women (1.9 babies per woman).
- The median age of the Indigenous population is 21 years (37 years for non-Indigenous).
- Only 3 per cent of Indigenous people are aged over 65 (13 per cent for non-Indigenous).
- Around 75 per cent of Indigenous people live in urban or regional areas of Australia. Only 25 per cent live in remote areas. Socio-economic disadvantage is marked in both remote and non-remote areas, and strategies to combat disadvantage for all Aboriginal Australians, wherever they live, are needed.
- Employment - Indigenous Australians experience much higher levels of unemployment than non-Indigenous Australians. At the time of the last Census (in 2006), around 48 per cent of the Indigenous workforce-aged population was in employment. This compares to 72 per cent for other Australians – a gap of 24 percentage points.

Source: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008)

Past mistreatment has created social and personal challenges for many Aboriginal people. The personal impact for individuals can include:

**Feelings of Shame**
Shame is a powerful behavioural emotion, leaving a person with feelings of disorientation, extreme embarrassment, uncomfortableness, dishonour, degradation, humiliation, loss of confidence and uncertainty. Shame can be difficult to identify as some Aboriginal people, through years of learnt behaviour, can hide this emotion making it difficult to identify even with an acute understanding of body language.

**Low self-esteem**
Generations of social disadvantage has led to many people experiencing low self esteem and social discomfort in unfamiliar environments.

**Poverty**
Individual and generational poverty can have a devastating impact on Aboriginal people and communities. Lack of educational and vocational opportunity and long term dependence on welfare, create cycles of poverty.

**Displaced from Country (Homeland)**
A primary issue for many individuals is the displacement from ‘country’ or from traditional homelands. Many Aboriginal people who live in urban or regional centres are there because of circumstances beyond their control. Many are also living in accommodation rented from either Homeswest or private landlords.

**Mental and/or physical health problems**
Aboriginal people are more likely to experience mental and/or physical health problems. They may live with these symptoms without diagnosis or treatment. The standard of health amongst Aboriginal people is the lowest in the nation.

**Education**
Learning in Aboriginal society was based on a very rich and sophisticated oral tradition. Learning environments that do not use a kinaesthetic approach (verbal, visual, touch and movement) can be alienating to Aboriginal learners.

**Mistrust of Government and/or their Representatives**
Past government policy decisions and legislation have left some Aboriginal people with a deep mistrust of Government and their represented agencies.

It is important to be mindful of the experiences of Aboriginal people and the consequences of past mistreatment.

Aboriginal people as the ‘First People’ of Australia have a rich culture and must have a prominent place in contemporary Australian society.
It is important that any relationship with Aboriginal people is underpinned by respect, honesty and an acknowledgement of the person’s cultural identity. As with most relationships, trust is built over time.

Historically, many Aboriginal people experienced discrimination and were excluded from community services and other social programs. This may be the reason for the current low representation of Aboriginal people using disability services. It is important that services acknowledge this sensitivity and provide extra effort to ensure Aboriginal people are aware of the services available and the willingness to adapt services to ensure all people feel welcome.

Aboriginal groups and communities will have a hierarchy of leadership and roles. Aboriginal elders have a leadership role in communities. Aboriginal elders are people who have gone through all the requirements of the law for their community, and are recognised as elders by that community. Traditional Aboriginal culture incorporates deep respect for all older community members. In urban communities, the elder system has been decimated, but there are still recognised elders in all Aboriginal communities. It is important to accord elders and older people full respect for their status in the community.

Get to Know Your Community
- Make contact with elders and community leaders. Introduce yourself and your services. Ask for guidance on how you should approach people in their communities: how to refer to clients, how to dress, and what particular protocols apply to the local communities.
- Find out if there are any community groups or regular places where Aboriginal people meet.
- Just as an Aboriginal person’s status and standing is based on community approval, so are yours and your represented agency. Don’t dress or act in a way that may intimidate people. Develop a good community reputation.
- Include elders in decision making and program development, open days or welcome to country ceremonies accords them proper status, and in the long term ensures that they are given their rightful place in the local community. It also establishes and maintains a trust in the agency that used this approach.
- Include a “Welcome to country” ceremony at any major functions. You could set up a “Welcome to country” ceremony for your agency. Use this occasion to present yourself and your agency to the local Aboriginal people. Contact your local Aboriginal Land Council, the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (see contact list in the back of this manual) and ask for assistance to contact the elders to perform the ceremony.
- The best way to find out about local protocols is to talk (have a yarn) with your local elders and community leaders.

Making people comfortable
Your office, or the place you meet people needs to be welcoming and culturally secure from the reception area onwards.
It can take a great deal of personal courage for some people to walk through the door as they may feel that they are entering unknown country. Some people may arrive with small children or even other family members. Having a box of toys and similar child friendly additions in the reception area and your office is a good idea.

**Consider allowing people to be seated facing the door.**
This could avert feelings of being trapped or closed in and will help to alleviate tension caused by unfamiliarity. Aboriginal people are not usually comfortable within an office environment.

It is common for children and other family members to attend scheduled appointments. If it is at all possible have access to a larger meeting room. A good idea is to have colour-in books (or scrap paper) and colour pencils available. You could also put children’s drawings on display. This proves to be a great icebreaker when meeting new people.

**Try not to sit face to face across a desk with people, Shift yourself to the side.**
Where possible, position your furniture so that you can sit to the side of your desk when talking with people. This is more comforting and sets up an environment for yarning or relaxed conversation and helps to create an atmosphere that was not so tense and rigid. Sitting face to face across a desk can be uncomfortable to many Aboriginal people.

**Simplify paperwork**
It can be a very uncomfortable and uneasy decision for an Aboriginal Person to seek your assistance and attend scheduled appointments in an office environment. The initial appointment can be made easier if you keep it short. Try simplifying the forms or electronic process and just do the necessary paperwork such as registration and signing the privacy act details.

*Note; on your forms where it requests, are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander you should also add “do you identify yourself as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander”? Some people choose not to identify.*

**Always have a box of tissues visible on your desk.**
Position a box of tissues in a spot so that it’s convenient and invitational for client use. This is because many times children will accompany a parent or caregiver and may have use for them.

**Visually comforting objects for your office.**
Aboriginal people are very patriotic about Aboriginal colours. The colours facilitate a sense of belonging, kinship and pride. Organisations could have the Australian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags represented in your office. Paintings and other art is helpful too. If you have an Aboriginal painting or other art make sure you find out who the artist is, and the story behind the painting, this is great as an ice breaker.

**Written Information**
Some Aboriginal people may not have adequate literacy and/or numeracy skills. If you suspect that this is the case, be sensitive and adapt information accordingly.

**Keep a harmonious atmosphere in your office.**
If appropriate play music in your office. Music is a common conversational topic. You can use it as an ice breaker to assist in breaking down communicational barriers.

**Empower people.**
This can simply be achieved by ensuring people clearly understand everything you are trying to achieve together and allowing people to contribute and direct conversation.

**Keep people actively engaged in the whole process.**
Never make a promise or commitment that you may not be able to fulfil.

Where appropriate, reiterate your organisations privacy policy.
Aboriginal people can experience discomfort if they feel that others know or may have access to their private information. Periodically assure people that their personal information will be kept secure and private.

Rapport development made easier
It doesn’t hurt to reveal some of your own personal information during early rapport development. A common factor you will have with all people around the world is children. Remember the three most important aspects to all Aboriginal People are Family, Spirituality and the Land. As an ice breaker you could talk about your children, nieces nephews etc. You could add why you are passionate about your chosen career and how you started in this field. Try to establish a relaxed, cheerful family orientated atmosphere. It is not good practice to get straight into business.

Eye contact can be offensive to some Aboriginal people.
Some Aboriginal people can be offended by direct eye contact, even more so with staring. You will know if eye contact is offensive by the amount of or lack of eye contact your client initiates. It is better to avoid eye contact on initial meetings.

First time you meet a person.
Always go out and greet people: offer to shake their hands (being aware of eye contact). Do not be offended if the hand shake is not reciprocated. Some people may choose not to shake your hand: this can be the case with some Aboriginal Women. There is little chance of offending if you offer a handshake but there is more of a chance of offending if you don’t. Make it a point of addressing elders by the title, Mr or Mrs.

Questioning.
If you ask for answers to an important question always allow the person the time they need to answer (there may be long periods of silence before the question is answered).

Beware of pre-conceived attitudes and prejudice.
Do not pre-judge a person based on clothing, mannerisms, confidence or their verbal communication. Aboriginal people can be very down to earth. They may not be as concerned with their outside appearance as the wider population. An Aboriginal person’s status is not based on appearance, self image, money, education, or employment. It is based on their community standing and social status.

An Aboriginal person’s speech may switch between talking in mainstream English to Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English is an accepted language in most Aboriginal communities in Australia. It is a mixture of English, local slangs and key words in local Aboriginal dialects. Each community has its own version of Aboriginal English, but it is easily transferable between communities.

You don’t look Aboriginal?
Under no circumstances should you mention to an Aboriginal person that they don’t look Aboriginal, nor ask them how much Aboriginal is in them. Saying “I would not have picked you as an Aboriginal” can also be insulting. If a person identifies as an Aboriginal, then this should never be questioned.
Making a Place for Aboriginal People in your Organisation

There are a variety of ways you could develop culturally responsive services for Aboriginal people. Below is a list of suggestions that could be considered by your organisation. Consider each in the context of your organisation and what will work best in your situation.

**Governance Level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reconciliation Action Plan</th>
<th>Develop a reconciliation plan. Visit <a href="http://www.reconciliation.org.au">www.reconciliation.org.au</a> for templates and other resources that can facilitate the development of a plan.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Develop policy statements such as ‘Culturally Secure Service for Aboriginal People’ that state the organisation’s commitment to Aboriginal People and culturally secure services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Board Members or Board Advisory Groups</td>
<td>Aboriginal people could be represented on the Board and/or Advisory Groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Performance Indicators (KPI)</td>
<td>KPI could be adopted in regard to employing Aboriginal people or providing service reach to Aboriginal people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Data, and trends, regarding Aboriginal service users and employees could be collected and reported to the Board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships</td>
<td>Work could be undertaken in partnership with local Aboriginal Organisations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Operational Strategy**

| Staff Orientation | Include your organisation’s commitment to respectful engagement with Aboriginal stakeholders (current and future) in staff orientation. |
| Aboriginal Employment Strategy | Employ Aboriginal People in a variety of roles within the organisation. |
| Cultural Support for Aboriginal Clients | Adapt service practices to the cultural needs of Aboriginal clients. Support Aboriginal clients to remain connected or reconnect with their culture. Consider appointing an Aboriginal Liaison Person who works across teams and with service users providing a pathway to cultural security. Be sensitive to gender issues, adapt service approaches accordingly. |
| Apply visual cues to build cultural security | Prominently display Aboriginal artwork and/or Aboriginal images/colours. Include Aboriginal people in marketing material. |
| Develop an ‘inclusive’ service culture | Foster positive attitudes from staff towards cultural diversity and Aboriginal People. No tolerance approach to racism in any form. |
| Welcome Aboriginal people | Acknowledgment of traditional owners (through statement or Welcome to Country) at all organisations significant events. To promote a warm welcome nominate a key person in your service who can become the key contact for Aboriginal people. |
6. ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

The recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff into disability services is an integral part of developing culturally secure services. It is important to develop the right attitudes and support system to ensure Aboriginal people have a secure place in your organisation. Where possible develop a mentoring strategy or work with an Aboriginal Organisation or Department that can provide this.

Developing an Aboriginal Employment Strategy can help address this situation. It can provide a proactive approach to ensure the disadvantage faced by many Aboriginal people in accessing employment is addressed. Every organisation will make its own decisions about the strategies that are most appropriate given its size and circumstances. This sample strategy provides some guidelines that an organisation could consider.
Guidelines
An Aboriginal employment strategy may cover a range of issues including:

- Why the service has the strategy;
- The importance of the strategy to the service;
- Promotion of the strategy to Aboriginal stakeholders including potential employees;
- Advice on how to gain commitment to the strategy from everyone in the organisation, and
- How to link the strategy to performance management systems.

Sample Strategy

Goal One: Become an employer of choice for Aboriginal people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote employment opportunities for Aboriginal people</td>
<td>• Identify what area of the workforce that may be of interest to Aboriginal people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Give presentations to jobseekers, through on-site tour or off-site presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Talk to schools as to attract young people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Talk to Centrelink or job network clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide work placements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish links with Aboriginal Employment service providers and Aboriginal organisations</td>
<td>• Arrange for a Job Network member to visit at least twice a year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Talk to and establish relationships with local Aboriginal agencies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop database of Aboriginal networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase Aboriginal cultural awareness throughout the organisation</td>
<td>• Ensure that all staff complete cultural awareness training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Acknowledge important Aboriginal celebrations such as, NAIDOC week, Sorry Day and other events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop systems to meet the special needs of Aboriginal staff</td>
<td>• Determine special needs of Aboriginal staff with the help of Job Network member or mentoring services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Encourage mentors to visit the workplace regularly in the initial period after recruitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Goal Two: Increase employment of Aboriginal People at all levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Review recruitment processes to ensure they are culturally appropriate | • Develop a recruitment checklist  
• Develop protocols for recruiting and employing Aboriginal people (e.g. Using Aboriginal media )  
• Where appropriate assign a workplace buddy to Aboriginal staff | | |
| Recognise the skills and contributions of Aboriginal staff | • Establish job descriptions to reflect the skills and knowledge of each employee, by clearly defining the value of practical skills and knowledge  
• Conduct annual staff performance appraisals | | |
| Enable Aboriginal employees to develop their own career strategies, goals and objectives | • Provide goal settings opportunities for staff annually at performance appraisals | | |
| Have a succession plan that gives Aboriginal people opportunities to move into management positions | • Acknowledge the career aspirations of staff  
• Select key positions to job share with Aboriginal people  
• Assign Aboriginal employees to sections where they have opportunities for career development | | |

### Goal Two: Increase employment of Aboriginal People at all levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set Aboriginal employment targets</td>
<td>• Review Aboriginal employment targets annually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report on workplace diversity</td>
<td>• Report on Aboriginal employment outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Assign an Aboriginal employment officer (if your organisation is big enough), or utilise existing employment networks | • Assign an appropriate Aboriginal employment officer  
• Ensure the officer is briefed on their duties and the expectations of the organisation | | |
| Evaluate the Aboriginal employment strategy | • Assess Aboriginal employment performance annually | | |

**Final Note:**  
NDS WA hopes that this Resource Manual has been (and continues to be) of benefit to you and your organisation. We trust the ideas and information allow you to move forward in making life and services better for all Australians.

*We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home.*

Australian Aboriginal Proverb
7. APPENDICES

Appendices

Appendix 1: Key agencies for assistance and referral

Department of Indigenous Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Fax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Kimberley</td>
<td>1st Floor, Woody’s Arcade 15 Dampier Terrace PO Box 1538 Broome 6725</td>
<td>(08) 9192 2865</td>
<td>(08) 9192 2850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Kimberley</td>
<td>Lot 2250 Coolibah Drive PO Box 672 Kununurra 6743</td>
<td>(08) 9168 2550</td>
<td>(08) 9168 2435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilbara</td>
<td>Lot 2, 18 Tonkin St. PO Box 2634 South Hedland WA 6722</td>
<td>(08) 9140 2577</td>
<td>(08) 9140 2588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gascoyne / Murchison</td>
<td>2nd Floor, SGIO Building 45 Cathedral Avenue PO Box 2105 Geraldton 6531</td>
<td>(08) 9964 5470</td>
<td>(08) 9964 5473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goldfields</td>
<td>Unit 8, Brookman Mews, Cnr Brookman &amp; Cassidy Sts PO Box 10387 Kalgoorlie</td>
<td>(08) 9021 5666</td>
<td>(08) 9021 5271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro / Wheatbelt</td>
<td>Ground Floor, South Node, DOLA Building Old Gt Northern Hwy PO Box 1696 Midland 6936</td>
<td>(08) 9274 4288</td>
<td>(08) 9274 1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>129 Aberdeen Street PO Box 5091 Albany 6330</td>
<td>(08) 9842 3000</td>
<td>(08) 9842 3517</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Aboriginal Medical Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Derbarl Yerrigan Aboriginal Health Service</td>
<td>156 Wittenoom Street, EAST PERTH WA 6004</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9421 3888, Fax: (08) 9421 3884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West Aboriginal Medical Service</td>
<td>Sandridge Street or PO Box 1444, BUNBURY WA 6230</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9791 2779, Fax: (08) 9791 6476, Clinic: (08) 9791 7666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bega Garnbirringu Health Service</td>
<td>16-19 McDonald Street, KALGOORLIE WA 6430</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9091 3199, Fax: (08) 9091 1039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngaanyatjarra Health Service</td>
<td>Shop 2/58 Head Street, ALICE SPRINGS NT 0871</td>
<td>PH: (08) 8950 1730, Fax: (08) 8953 4581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnarvon Aboriginal Medical Services</td>
<td>14-16 Rushton Street, CARNARVON WA 6701</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9941 2499, Fax: (08) 9941 2024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Health Service</td>
<td>30-32 Holland Street RANGEGAY WA 6530</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9956 6555, Fax: (08) 9964 3225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mawarnkarra Health Service Aboriginal Corporation</td>
<td>20 Scholl Street or PO Box 56 ROEBOURNE WA 6718</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9182 0800, Fax: (08) 9182 1300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wirraka Maya Aboriginal Health Service</td>
<td>Unit 1, 5 Hamilton Street, SOUTH HEDLAND WA 6722</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9172 0405, Fax: (08) 9140 2295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service</td>
<td>Suite 12/20 Hilditch Avenue, Newman, WA, 6753</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9177 8307, Fax: (08) 9175 0990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beagle Bay Community Health Service</td>
<td>PO Box 1377 BROOME WA 6725</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9192 4912, Fax: (08) 9192 4440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidyadanga Aboriginal Community Health Service</td>
<td>PO Box 634 BROOME WA 6725</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9192 4914, Fax: (08) 9192 4440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broome Regional Medical Service</td>
<td>640 Dora Street or PO Box 1879 BROOME WA 6725</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9192 1338, Fax (08) 9192 1606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derby Aboriginal Medical Service</td>
<td>1 Stanley Street or PO Box 1155, DERBY WA 6728</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9193 1090, Fax: (08) 9193 1903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurruk Aboriginal Health Service</td>
<td>1 Stanley Street or PO Box 1155, DERBY WA 6728</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9168 6266, Fax: (08) 9168 6028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nindillingarri Cultural Health Service</td>
<td>PO Box 59, FITZROY CROSSING WA 6765</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9193 0093, Fax: (08) 9193 0094</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Land and Sea Councils

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Fax</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERTH</strong></td>
<td>Lv 1, 63 Adelaide Terrace East Perth WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6004</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9263 8700</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9218 9449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KALGOORLIE-BOULDER</strong></td>
<td>14 Throssell Street Kalgoorlie-Boulder WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6430</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9091 1661</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9091 1662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BROOME</strong></td>
<td>PO Box 2145 36 Pembroke St, Broome WA 6725</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9193 6199</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9193 6279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KUNUNURRA</strong></td>
<td>PO Box 821 Lot 2229 Speargrass Rd, Kununurra WA 6743</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9168 2298</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9168 1509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DERBY</strong></td>
<td>PO Box 377 Lot 285 Loch St, Derby WA 6728</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9193 1118</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9193 1163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUTHWEST (NOONGAR)</strong></td>
<td>HomeTown Centre 1490 Albany Highway Cannington WA 6107</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9358 7400</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9358 7499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GERALDTON (YAMATJI)</strong></td>
<td>171 Marine Tce Geraldton WA P.O. Box 2119 Geraldton WA 6531</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9965 6222</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9964 5646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOUTH HEDLAND</strong></td>
<td>3 Brand St South Hedland WA P.O. Box 2252 South Hedland WA 6722</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9172 5433</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9140 1277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KARRATHA</strong></td>
<td>Units 4 &amp; 5 26-32 DeGrey Pl, Karratha P.O. Box 825 Karratha WA 6714</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9144 2866</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9144 2795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOM PRICE</strong></td>
<td>118 Oleander St Tom Price WA P.O. Box 27 Tom Price WA 6751</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9188 1722</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9188 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERTH</strong></td>
<td>5th Floor 256 Adelaide Tce Perth WA P.O. Box 3072 Adelaide Tce WA 6832</td>
<td>PH: (08) 9268 7000</td>
<td>Fax: (08) 9225 4633</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Useful websites

Reconciliation Australia (Free online Cultural Awareness – Look in Resources Tab)
www.reconciliation.org.au

Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination
www.oipc.gov.au

Trinity College
www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/indig/sites.htm

Australian Government Indigenous website
www.indigenous.gov.au

Aboriginal English – Edith Cowen University
www.ecu.edu.au (write Aboriginal English in the search engine.)

Aboriginal Australia Map

Department of Immigration and Citizenship
www.immi.gov.au

Disability Services Commission
www.dsc.wa.gov.au

Department of Employment, Education & Workplace Relations
www.toolboxes.dewr.gov.au (Indigenous tools)

Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training (ICAT)
www.icat.itraustralia.com

What to do if one of ‘our mob’ passes away.

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island People and their Communities
This site is for board and committee members, managers, coordinators, team leaders
and workers in human service organisations.
www.workingwithatsi.info/content/FYU.htm
Appendix 3: Further support and reading

Listed below are some agency resource links that you might find useful. This is just an overview of services available. You could use these links as a starting point and gradually build your own agency resource network based on your community needs and region.

**Department for Child Protection**
Perth Central Office – Family Information Records Bureau
189 Royal Street,
East Perth WA 6004
Telephone: (08) 9222 2555
Free call: 1800 000 277 for STD
Website: www.community.wa.gov.au/DCP/

For contacts in regional and remote areas just follow the web links

**Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS)**
7 Aberdeen Street, East Perth WA 6004
Telephone: 08 9265 6666
Freecall: 1800 019 900
Website: www.als.org.au

For contacts in regional and remote areas just follow the web links
ALS Delivering legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Western Australia

**Department of Health in Western Australia**
189 Royal Street, East Perth WA 6004
Telephone: (08) 9222 4222
Freecall: 1800 6676 822 for STD
Website: www.health.wa.gov.au/services

Click Aboriginal health under “Information about”

**Yahning Aboriginal Corporation**
Rear 11 Patrick Court, Girrawheen. WA 6064
Telephone: (08) 9247 0700
Community Skills Training and Family Services
- Community development agency training
- Family services
- Domestic violence
- Emergency relief
- Emergency accommodation
- Cultural awareness – best practices for engaging Aboriginal People

**For historical information:**
**State Library of WA Alexander Library**
Battye Library – of WA history
T: (08) 9427 3111
T: 1800 198 107 Country callers only
Appendix 4: Aboriginal Flag

The Aboriginal Flag

The Aboriginal Flag is divided horizontally into equal halves of black (top) and red (bottom), with a yellow circle in the centre.

The black symbolises Aboriginal people and the yellow represents the sun, the constant renewer of life. Red depicts the earth and peoples’ relationship to the land. It also represents ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.

The flag – designed by Harold Joseph Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia – was first flown at Victoria Square, Adelaide on National Aborigines’ Day on 12 July 1971. It was used later at the Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972.

Today the flag has been adopted by all Aboriginal groups and is flown or displayed permanently at Aboriginal centres throughout Australia.
The Tindale tribal boundaries were determined by Norman Tindale, after extensive research across Australia, publishing his findings in 1940. This map was republished in 1974, and the map included here is an adaptation of Tindale's. Copyright is held by the Tindale family, and is managed by the South Australian Museum.
Appendix 6: Welcome to Country

Aboriginal custodianship of country needs to be recognised where possible at all public events. Due recognition of the traditional owners of country assists in developing strong partnerships with Aboriginal communities across Western Australia. It demonstrates the commitment the agency has to reconciliation and is an important sign of respect for Aboriginal People;

Arranging a *Welcome to Country* ceremony that acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land shows respect for Aboriginal people as Australia’s first peoples. Ceremonies and protocols are a fundamental part of Aboriginal culture.

Valuing and respecting appropriate Aboriginal ceremony are pertinent to increasing the understanding and mutual respect for cultural practices both by Aboriginal Australians and the wider community. Appropriate cultural engagement seeks to observe protocols and the sharing of cultural practices.

Improving relationships between the local Aboriginal community and the broader community through ceremony, protocols and the process of collaborative negotiation is essential.

The *Welcome to Country* ceremony is to be undertaken ONLY by Elders, locally recognised Aboriginal community spokesperson or locally recognised cultural service provider.

There is no exact wording for *Welcome to Country*. As such, the content of the ceremony should be negotiated between the agency and the provider with reference to the nature of the event and community practices. Generally, providers offer participants local Aboriginal history and cultural information and will go on to welcome the delegates to the country.

The traditional owners/custodians should to be approached to undertake the *Welcome to Country* ceremony. This is dependent upon the location of the event and the practices of the local Aboriginal community. It is important to ensure that negotiations with the local Aboriginal community have occurred and that appropriate Aboriginal Elders are invited to undertake the ceremony.

Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Indigenous Coordination Centres are key contacts for Elders, who can undertake a *Welcome to Country*. The Department of Indigenous Affairs, the Office of Aboriginal Health or Aboriginal Medical Centres may also be contacted for advice on the appropriate persons to approach.

If a *Welcome to Country* ceremony cannot be undertaken then an *Acknowledgement of Country* should to be conducted.
Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way, that an Aboriginal person who is not a traditional owner or custodian of the land where the event is being held or for non-Aboriginal people, to respect Aboriginal heritage.

An Acknowledgment of Country is only to be undertaken when no traditional owner or custodian is available to do so and all avenues to locate one within the community have been undertaken.

A Chair, Speaker, Master of Ceremonies or other can begin the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional owners.

If it is clear who are the ‘traditional owners/custodians of land’ it is appropriate to say so.

An example of an Acknowledgement of Country could be:

Wording for an Aboriginal person who is not a traditional owner of the land where the event is being held:

“I am (name) an Aboriginal person from (tribe/clan) and I acknowledge the traditional owners or custodians of the land (insert name if known) we are meeting on and remind people that we are on Aboriginal land. I also acknowledge our Elders and in particular those attending today’s event

Wording for a non-Aboriginal person:

“I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners or custodians of the land (insert name if known) we are meeting on and remind people that we are on Aboriginal land. I also acknowledge the Elders and in particular those attending today’s event”

Acknowledging Elders

It is important that all speakers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, acknowledge any Elders in attendance prior to presenting or speaking.