

Welcome to  
Acknowledgement of

# COUNTRY

Guidelines and Protocols for NSW Public Schools and TAFE NSW Institutes

Yaama  
cultural Giinagay  
reconciliation

home

Marang Ngindhugir Nginha

respect

Warami Budyari

recognition

Wadeo

tradition

Yugga-danya



Education &  
Communities



New South Wales  
Aboriginal Education  
Consultative Group Inc.

## Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Guidelines and Protocols for NSW Public Schools and TAFE NSW Institutes

### A JOINT STATEMENT

The NSW Department of Education and Communities (the department), in collaboration with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG Inc.) are committed to working in genuine partnership in Aboriginal education and training. As part of this commitment we present to you protocols to be used in all state and regional events in NSW public schools, TAFE NSW institutes and campuses.

The department and the NSW AECG Inc. advocate the promotion of greater understanding of Aboriginal cultures in the wider community and endorses the use of appropriate Aboriginal protocols in schools, TAFE NSW institutes, other educational institutions, formal and informal meetings, public meetings and ceremonies.

The NSW AECG Inc. encourages other organisations and entities throughout NSW to recognise Aboriginal custodianship of country and acknowledge the significance of Aboriginal cultures in Australia.

Arranging a "Welcome to Country" ceremony and "acknowledging 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 cultures.

The issues of valuing and respecting appropriate Aboriginal ceremony are relevant to increasing the understanding and mutual respect for cultural practices by both Aboriginal Australians and the wider community through observation of protocols and sharing in cultural practice.

Improving relationships between the local Aboriginal community and the wider community through ceremony, protocols and the process of collaborative negotiation is vital. As a means of promoting greater understanding of Aboriginal cultures in the wider community, the department and the NSW AECG Inc. endorses the use of appropriate Aboriginal protocols and ceremonies.

This document provides information and guidelines for [Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country protocols](#).

It is essential that these [protocols are used in consultation with the local Aboriginal community](#) to ensure local customs and etiquette are adhered to respectfully.

The department is committed to the process of reconciliation and to fostering and maintaining active partnerships with Aboriginal communities, in recognising Aboriginal people as the custodians of this land and ensuring that respect for Aboriginal cultures is promoted in all departmental activities.

## Welcome to Country

The traditional custodians of the land, usually senior representative of the local Aboriginal community, should undertake the "Welcome to Country" ceremony. However, this is dependent upon the location of the event and the practice of the community. Steps should be taken to ensure that the appropriate Aboriginal representative is invited to undertake the ceremony. It is very important that the Aboriginal representative has been involved in and is comfortable with the arrangements.

## Acknowledgement of Country

An "Acknowledgement of Country" is a way that all people can show respect for Aboriginal cultures and heritage and the ongoing relationship the traditional custodians have with the land.

At the commencement of a meeting or function, a chair or speaker begins by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional custodians. Where the name of the traditional custodians is known, it is specifically used. Where it is not known, a general acknowledgement is given.

Examples of "Acknowledgement of Country"

### Example 1.

I would like to pay my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this meeting takes place, and also pay respect to Elders both past and present

### Example 2.

I would like to Acknowledge the \_\_\_\_\_ people who are the traditional custodians of this land. I would also like to pay respect to Elders both past and present of the \_\_\_\_\_ nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people present.

Local Aboriginal organisations including the NSW AECG Inc. NSW Aboriginal Land Council or Elders Council and government organisations including the NSW Department of Education and Communities, Aboriginal Education and Community Engagement Unit can provide advice as to the traditional custodians of the land.

# Guidelines for the Recognition and Promotion of Aboriginal Cultures and Custodianship of Country

## *What is a Welcome to Country?*

A "Welcome to Country" is where the traditional Aboriginal custodians (in most cases, Elders) welcome people to their land. This is a significant recognition and is made through a formal process. A "Welcome to Country" should always occur in the opening ceremony of the event in question, preferably as the first item.

The "Welcome to Country" is conducted by a representative/s of the local Aboriginal custodians who welcome the delegates, those in attendance, invited guests, staff and students to their country. Protocols in relation to the performing of a "Welcome to Country" ceremony are wide and diverse and can vary according to region and locality.

A "Welcome to Country" may consist of a single speech by the representative/s of the local Aboriginal community, or it can also include a performance (which will vary according to region and locality). Performances may include a traditional Welcoming Song, a traditional dance, didgeridoo performance or a combination of the aforementioned.

It is important that the Aboriginal representative/s are comfortable with the arrangements that should be mutually negotiated and it is important to note that the NSW AECG Inc. endorses the notion that the performing of a "Welcome to Country" ceremony is a right of the local Aboriginal custodians and not a privilege.

## *Acknowledgement of Country:*

"Acknowledgement of Country" is a way the wider community can demonstrate respect for Aboriginal protocol and can be performed by any party that is participating in an occasion of any kind.

"Acknowledgement of Country" can be performed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. It is a demonstration of respect dedicated to the traditional custodians of the land where the gathering of participants is being conducted.

"Acknowledgement of Country" is a respectful and easy practice in which to engage. Acknowledgement of Country is a respectful means of acknowledging that the event, meeting, school or TAFE function, etc. is taking place on the country of the traditional custodians.

Government, organisations and departments are adopting the practice of acknowledging the traditional custodians of Country at events, ceremonies, meetings and functions. The NSW AECG Inc. encourages all members to demonstrate appropriate acknowledgement when in any forum, from general state office meetings to formal gatherings and functions and school or TAFE events.

### *Collaboration and Negotiation:*

One of the most significant practices for all parties is the capacity to show mutual respect for different cultural groups and their practices. It is important to understand that the meanings of ceremonies and acts of practices differ across region and locality.

It is important to invite the local Aboriginal representatives into any proposal for participation from the onset and to talk together to decide the format of the ceremony, who should be invited, who should perform the "Welcome to Country" and how that person will be recognised for their time and commitment. The initial contact with appropriate traditional custodians of the country on which the meeting, event or function is to take place, can sometimes, be a complex process.. Observing Aboriginal protocol may include allowing time for customary decision making and discussion among the traditional custodians.

The initial connection process can be given assistance by the local and regional AECG members who have extensive experience in their local community. Further contacts can be sought from the following:

- \* The Aboriginal Land Council in your local area;
- \* The Municipal Council / Shire;
- \* The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, National Parks and Wildlife Division
- \* Aboriginal Medical Services in your local area; and
- \* Department of Education and Communities school education region, Regional Aboriginal field staff and TAFE NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Units.

Not just any Aboriginal person can perform a "Welcome to Country", it must be given by an appropriate person, for example a recognised Elder within the local community. In some parts of the state there are disputes about who may be the traditional custodians of an area. This should be recognised as an effect of dispossession, which has meant people have been dislocated from their land and have returned to an area where they may not be accepted as traditional custodians by some.



### *Other Protocols and Ceremonies:*

The NSW AECG Inc. recognises and acknowledges that there are a significant number of Aboriginal ceremonies and or protocols that necessitate respect. Some of these Aboriginal ceremonies and protocols are sensitive and are not discussed or shared with the broader community. These can include:

- \* Knowledge that is specific to gender, commonly known as "Women's Business" or "Men's Business";
- \* Not mentioning the name of a deceased Aboriginal person, or showing photographic images of a deceased person unless agreed to by relevant family members;
- \* Initiation ceremonies; and
- \* The period of mourning for deceased Aboriginal people that is referred to as "Sorry Business".

Please note these practices may apply in some areas but not in all parts of the state. If you are unsure whether a group or individual may be sensitive about an issue or issues of protocol or ceremony you can check with your local AECG member or Local Aboriginal Land Council.

In most cases people will acknowledge if you are being intrusive and / or if they are not permitted to talk to you about the protocol or ceremony because of your age, gender, status or because you do not belong to their clan or tribal group. If in any doubt about these types of issues always ask.

### *How do we do it?*

The type of ceremony performed at an event should be appropriate to the nature and size of the event. When planning an event you should consult with Aboriginal staff within your school, TAFE NSW institute or workplace or school education regional office to provide advice on:

- \* the appropriate level of Aboriginal recognition;
- \* the appropriate ceremonies and performances; and
- \* community representatives who should be contacted.

### *Two ceremonies can be performed:*

- \* "Welcome to Country" by local Aboriginal people of that land;
- and
- \* "Acknowledgement of Country" by all people, children and adults.