

# **ABORIGINAL CULTURAL PROTOCOLS AND PRACTICES POLICY**

## **Purpose**

The New South Wales Government recognises the unique position of Aboriginal people in our culture and history.

The Government, on behalf of the people of the State, is committed to the process of genuine recognition of the truth of Australia's history, and addressing the disadvantage that Aboriginal people continue to face today.

Aboriginal people are the original owners of the land and it is important that this special position of Aboriginal people is recognised and incorporated into official protocol to enable the wider community to share in Aboriginal culture and facilitate better relationships between Aboriginal people and the general community.

Official events and ceremonies engage the attention of participants, observers and the broader community. These events also symbolise the values of our community and the way we envision ourselves.

By incorporating Aboriginal cultural practices/ceremonies into official events we are able to:

- Recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal peoples, cultures and heritage.
- Communicate Aboriginal cultural practices to the broader community to promote respect and understanding.
- Demonstrate that Aboriginal cultures are living through maintenance and practice of ceremonies and protocols.
- Demonstrate recognition of Aboriginal people unique position which can assist in building relationships and partnerships.

The purpose of this policy is to assist NSW Public Sector agencies to observe the appropriate protocols for the recognition of Aboriginal people at official events or at events where the NSW Government is a major sponsor.

## **Observation of Aboriginal Protocols**

The type of ceremony undertaken at an official event should be appropriate to the nature and size of each event in accordance with the procedures set out below and negotiations with local Aboriginal Elders and organisations.

It is important to note that ceremonies and practices differ from place to place. The planning timetable of official events should allow time for negotiations with Aboriginal communities, as well, discussion and decision making within those communities.

### **Minimum requirements**

When planning an official event, agencies should consult with a number of organisations to plan and organise ceremonies. These organisations include; the Local Aboriginal Land Council, ATSIC Regional Council, other regional Aboriginal representative or advisory structures, Native Title Services NSW, NSW Aboriginal Land Council and/or the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

These organisations can provide specific information on:

- Appropriate ceremonies and performances.
- Aboriginal Elders and communities who should be contacted.
- Contacts for Aboriginal cultural practice provider.

As a minimum requirement, an *Acknowledgement of Country* ceremony should be undertaken. A protocol for the ceremony is provided below. At events at which flags are shown, the order of display, from an audience perspective from left to right, the Australian flag, the NSW flag, the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag.

### **Major Official Events**

All major official events, where members of the public, representatives of other Governments and/or the media are present, should include a *Welcome to Country* ceremony. Events in this category include:

- commemorations and major festivals;
- major launches of Government policies and programs;
- conferences held or sponsored by the NSW Government;
- International events held in Australia of which the NSW Government is an organiser or sponsor;
- Citizenship ceremonies; and,
- major and international sporting events.

Agencies and communities are encouraged to be innovative in recognising Aboriginal heritage. Other ceremonies or practices may also be undertaken as considered appropriate by Aboriginal people, including dances and performances. However, as indicated above, a *Welcome to Country* should be incorporated into all major events.

At events which are not official events, but where the NSW Government is a major sponsor, negotiations should be undertaken with the event organiser to incorporate a *Welcome to Country* into the event, where Aboriginal people believe it appropriate.

### **Calendar**

Each agency should develop its own calendar/database of significant events in which Aboriginal ceremonies will be undertaken.

### **Appropriate Ceremonies**

#### ***Welcome to Country***

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

There is no exact wording when Welcoming 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.

### ***Acknowledgement of Country***

An *Acknowledgment of Country* is a way that non-Aboriginal people can show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and the ongoing relationship of traditional owners with the land.

A Chair or Speaker begins the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional owners. On occasion, there may be disputes about who the traditional owners are. Those who acknowledge the country, can 'acknowledge *all* the traditional owners of the land' or can 'acknowledge the traditional owners of *this land*' without naming those people. Acknowledging Country in this way will not cause offence where there is some potential or actual dispute around ownership.

Typical Acknowledgement of Country statements can include:

- I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.
- I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on Aboriginal land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people in this land.

### ***Smoking Ceremony***

Smoking ceremonies are conducted by Aboriginal people with specialized cultural knowledge. The ceremony aims to cleanse the space in which the ceremony takes place. Given the significant nature of the ceremony, smoking ceremonies are usually only performed at major events.

### ***Other Ceremonies***

As indicated previously, other ceremonies may be undertaken along with those outlined above. Agencies are encouraged to consult with local Aboriginal communities on the best form of recognition for each event the ceremony reflects the NSW Government's commitment to Reconciliation.

### ***Fee for Service***

In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, artistic performances and ceremonies Aboriginal people are using their intellectual property. As such providers of these services should be appropriately remunerated.

Appropriate remuneration and/or assistance should be negotiated between the cultural service provider and the agency, considering:

- Travel to and from the event
- Public profile of the event

Contact The NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs for further information:

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