



ACT
Government

**CITY
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Caring for Country in the City Centre

Staff guide for Traditional Custodians engagement





United Ngunnawal Elders Charter

On behalf of the United Ngunnawal Council, we gift you this Charter to find inspiration in it while you use it.

Our Unity is a journey of healing. We have taken the first big step. The path people will join us on, but everyone is welcome.

In welcoming people, we know the following to be true:

"That our Elders have our respect and are honoured by their giving back. We acknowledge their assuming responsibility as leaders of our community.

"We need to come together for our future - one in which we can all live in a place where they can feel safe, have dignity, and feel they belong.

"That communication is essential and we do this in a supportive way. We know more about each other's history and our culture. The knowledges we make are ours together, although it belongs to us, but it's also for our kids and grandkids too. And it is for the future we do this work now.

"It takes courage to do work for the greater good. We need to be able to solve problems, include not just ourselves but listen with our hearts and spirit to our souls.

"In being courageous we are able to link back to the Dreamtime. The essence of Aboriginality, as a relationship to land.

"On our journey we strive for a future of empowering people with confidence, self-respect and respect for difference so we can all move together, moving forward.

"Every one of us has a role to play in ourselves and in the community. This, too, is our responsibility.

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

We are committed to engaging Traditional Custodians in the City Centre's renewal

Yuma

A key objective of the City Renewal Authority (the Authority) is the creation of welcoming and inclusive places in our City Centre for all Canberrans to enjoy.

Recognising, reflecting and learning about the importance that land and landscape have for First Nations cultures and peoples is fundamental to creating places that represent and reflect who we are and how we use and experience our city.

That insight is central to helping the Authority realise our vision to transform the City Renewal Precinct into a network of places that reflects their rich culture, and values and builds on our shared history.

Christine Covington
Chair

The renewal of Canberra's City Centre provides valuable opportunities to raise the visibility of the Ngunnawal people and their culture, and progress reconciliation by acknowledging what came before.

We are committed to 'sharing the table' and actively learning in a true partnership with First Nations.

We confidently look forward to working with First Nations people to play our part in our nation's journey toward reconciliation.

Yarra

Malcolm Snow
CEO

What we've heard from Ngunnawal leaders about how to collaborate on renewal

In February 2023 the Authority's Board met with the Dhawura-Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee to discuss how we can best collaborate. Here is a summary of what we heard from the Committee, including direct quotes from committee members highlighted in italics.

“Tell the Ngunnawal story — educate people through storytelling, artwork, native plants, sculpture, language and song. The story of what was there before is vital truth telling for education purposes.”

Truth-telling and visibility

- Ngunnawal culture should have a strong visible presence in the City Centre.
- Truth-telling is important — acknowledge what was before.
- History here is much older than the Burley-Griffin plan.

“We still have a Ngunnawal presence on Country. In this reimagining of our City Centre, we want to have a strong and visible presence.”

Country and nature

- Ngunnawal Country is nowhere else, so recognise it here.
- There are opportunities for a dedicated place for Ngunnawal people in the City Centre.
- Healthy waterways are culturally important.
- Untouched nature is important to us — balance this with the built environment.

“Nowhere else in the world can you see Ngunnawal Country — so we must do it here.”

Equal collaboration

- Namarag is an important precedent for collaboration.
- These are rare and great opportunities — we must not miss them.
- Share the table with us — don't just bring us ideas and then ask us for feedback.

“Don't just bring us ideas and then ask us for feedback. Have us at the table to co-design the ideas. Share the table with us. Let us show you what should be there — let us bring the identity back.”

How we are progressing reconciliation

Our activities to progress reconciliation are governed by our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). We deliver on our RAP commitments in partnership with the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development (EPSD) Directorate and Suburban Land Agency as part of the EPSD Portfolio.

Our reconciliation activities are organised into four themes, and governed by the Authority's RAP Working Group:

- 1. Community:** Relationships, engagement and inclusion.
- 2. Culture:** Awareness, recognition, acknowledgment and learning.
- 3. Business:** Procurement and economic development.
- 4. Reporting:** Tracking our progress so that we meet our commitments.

Some of our specific reconciliation activities include:

- Acknowledging Country at all staff meetings and major meetings.
- Mandatory cultural awareness training for all staff.
- Procuring through Supply Nation-certified businesses where possible.
- Capturing and sharing cultural stories where appropriate.
- Raising visibility of Ngunnawal culture through major city-shaping projects.
- Using Ngunnawal language where possible, and with permission.

We are doing much more than the above activities, but it changes year to year. For more detail on our approach, check out the Authority's [RAP Activity Plan](#) (internal link) and the [EPSD Portfolio Reconciliation Action Plan](#).



Engaging Traditional Custodians in your project

We are clear about our reasons for engaging First Nations people*

A commitment to engage also requires openness and clarity about how, why and when First Nations communities will be consulted and how much influence there will be in the decision-making process.

A commitment to engage with First Nations peoples also means being realistic and honest about the purpose of engagement. Effective engagement requires ‘front-end’ planning to ensure that the engagement methods and processes are ‘fit for purpose’ and this means:

- Being clear about the objectives and outcomes sought from the engagement.
- Being prepared to explain the purpose and reach of the policy, service or program including both its inclusions and exclusions.
- Being open about your agency’s capacity to meet community expectations as a result of the engagement.
- Being prepared to follow through with agreements made with communities at the time of engagement (e.g. an outcomes report).

*This section is an excerpt from [Protocols for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#), ACT ATSIEB, Sept 2015

1. Clarify your purpose

- Consider your **reasons for engaging**.
- Identify the need in your project canvas.

2. Scope and resource it

- Prepare a comms and engagement work order.
- **Seek advice.**

3. Plan carefully

- Prepare an engagement strategy.
- Determine **who and how to engage**.

4. Follow best practice

- Follow **engagement protocols**.
- Meet commitments about involvement in decision-making.

Bold text indicates more information is in the following sections.

Terminology

First, here's some clarification on different terms.

Traditional Custodians:

The ACT Government recognises the Ngunnawal people as Traditional Custodians of the ACT and surrounding region. The Government acknowledges that other people and families also have a traditional connection to the lands of the ACT and region and we respect this connection to country.

First Nations: This term is used globally. In Australia, the term refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but we prefer to say First Nations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are descendants of the First Peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands.

Indigenous: Avoid using this word. Instead, it's kind to be as specific as you can.

Always capitalise the words above.
Do not use acronyms.

Seek advice first

The Authority's Communications and Engagement team holds a range of useful relationships in this space.

You can also speak with:

- **EPSD's Traditional Custodian Engagement Manager.**
- The **ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's** representative to EPSD meets with the Director General and CEOs of the Authority and SLA regularly.
- **Aunty Roslyn Brown** can be contacted via the Authority's arrangement with Dionysus/ University of Canberra under our Place Management Services.
- First Nations **engagement consultants.**
- **The Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs** (Community Services Directorate).

See page 9 of [Protocols for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#) for more local groups.

Who to engage

There are several different representative groups for Traditional Custodians and First Nations people in the ACT.

- **Dhawura-Ngunnawal Caring for Country Committee:** EPSD's consultative committee is made up of Ngunnawal people.
- **United Ngunnawal Elders Council:** The ACT's peak Ngunnawal decision-making body on Ngunnawal issues.
- [Representative Aboriginal Organisations](#) must be involved in issues related to heritage-listed First Nations items.
- **ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body:** The ACT's democratically voted decision-making body on First Nations issues. Typically made up of Traditional Custodians and First Nations people from Country elsewhere.

Engagement protocols

There are many protocols and considerations for engaging Traditional Custodians.

Before undertaking engagement, staff should:

1. Review the [Protocols for working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples](#), ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, September 2015.
2. Complete the EPSD Cultural Awareness Training.

Special considerations

In addition to other groups, we take care to engage the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to ensure representativeness in our engagement.

As an Authority, we are committed to supporting Traditional Custodians to share their culture. We carefully document what we hear, and work with Traditional Custodians to share it in our projects — but always with their permission.

We ensure male and female staff attend engagement, reflecting the cultural differences in men's and women's business. We also respect sorry business, which may require changes in dates for engagement at short notice.

Additionally, we:

- Value relationships. We make time to get to know each other and maintain relationships, and have consistency in staff representation.
- Aim to meet face to face, but we're prepared to meet online if that's their preference.
- Meet on Country where possible.
- Value time and use it wisely. We consolidate projects and meetings as much as we can, and we remunerate Ngunnawal participants in our processes and events for their time.

Further resources

Essential guidance

- [Protocols for working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples](#), ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, September 2015

Additional guidance

- [Reference guide – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness](#), CIT Yuruana Centre
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-2018](#), ACT Government



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