

# Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

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## Introduction

A protocol is defined as a behavioural code that people use to show respect to each other. Each culture has different sets of procedures and gestures that are understood to be polite. In working respectfully with Indigenous communities there are several important protocols worth knowing and understanding.

The first is the Welcome to Country and while there is no prescriptive Welcome to Country protocol appropriate for all communities, contexts or geographical locations, there are easy to understand guidelines. The Welcome to Country is usually conducted by an Elder of the Aboriginal language group who originate in the location of where your event is held. In some situations there may be more than one language group and this requires following a specific set of procedures to show proper respect to all.

The second and related protocol is the Acknowledgement of Country. This is used when no Indigenous leader or elder is present at a meeting, presentation or public event and is conducted by a non-Indigenous person.

## Background

While these protocols should be followed out of general politeness it's important to understand they have other roles which help to facilitate reconciliation and strengthen Aboriginal identity.

### This includes acknowledgment that:

- Aboriginal Australia is recognised as the oldest living culture in the world. Originally consisting of diverse nations and languages, the Aboriginal people within NSW experienced massive change to their way of life as a result of European colonisation.
- Indigenous cultural expression plays a major role in the revitalisation of cultural practices and continued strengthening of Aboriginal identity.
- Indigenous culture is informed by the past, and that Indigenous cultural expression is a vital part of contemporary society.
- Self-determination for Aboriginal communities is supported by setting cultural priorities and the adoption of appropriate cultural protocols in the public sector.
- The public sector plays an important role in supporting, maintaining and nurturing Indigenous cultural heritage and expression.
- Respect and visibility in public events especially in the arts and cultural community fosters goodwill and strengthens cultural identity.
- Acknowledging the diversity within Indigenous communities and their different cultural bases of histories, geography, languages, political and social contexts is important.

## Tips for success

Welcome to Country can be used in several ways - as an Indigenous formality to complement other formalities of an event or as a traditional welcome by the Indigenous community through dance and music.

The Welcome to Country is most effective when the host organisation consults with the local Indigenous community for these events.

Involving an Indigenous representative from the local area is highly recommended. This can be established by seeking the advice of the local Aboriginal Land Council, the Local Council or the Council's Aboriginal Liaison Officer if one is available. If the Local Council has an Aboriginal Consultative Committee or group they will also be a useful resource.

Welcome to Country formats can be quite formal or complex—if there are several Indigenous Elders or groups in the area they may each want to present a Welcome to Country. They may also have their individual way in which they want to present it. This can be in the form of their own story about their life as an Indigenous person in Australia and their relationship to their family and the local area. It could be in the form of a symbolic gesture of reconciliation eg: an Elder offers a large branch of a tree with leaves to guests and asks guests to take a leaf from the branch away with them.

After an Indigenous representative gives an official Welcome to Country for an event, other speakers (both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous) are encouraged to acknowledge the original custodians of the land before they commence their speech.

When there is more than one Indigenous language group in the area and you are not sure which group should be approached consult your Local Aboriginal Land Council or Local Council first.

If an Indigenous representative or an Elder of the original custodians is not available for the Welcome to Country, ensure the other Indigenous language group representative acknowledges the original custodians before introducing their own community.

## Payment

In many cases Welcome to Country is performed free of charge as an act of generosity by the Indigenous community. It is important to acknowledge this.

It is not customary for an Indigenous Elder or representative to request payment for a Welcome to Country though it is courteous to make an offer of an honorary payment.

Payment may be necessary in certain circumstances. If an Indigenous person's participation is needed for a relatively short period of time but requires significant travel for that person, their travel and meal costs should be covered.

If you need Indigenous participation for more than half a day payment is necessary. This also applies for any formal consultation you may require regarding cultural protocols or Indigenous policy issues. Any travel, meal or accommodation costs should be covered.



### You might also like ...

#### **Prepare an Acknowledgement of Country Statement Fact Sheet, M&G NSW**

[mgsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/aboriginal/prepare-acknowledgment-country-statement/](https://mgsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/aboriginal/prepare-acknowledgment-country-statement/)

#### **City of Sydney, Welcome to Country**

[cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/council/about-council/welcome-to-country](https://cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/council/about-council/welcome-to-country)

#### **Australian Land Councils, Local Land Council lists**

[alc.org.au/media/28807/LALC%20Contact%20List%201%2012%2009.pdf](https://alc.org.au/media/28807/LALC%20Contact%20List%201%2012%2009.pdf)