



Cultural Protocols and Principles Endorsing Statement

As signatories to this document we support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in their efforts to develop into lead organisations.

We support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations attracting funding and becoming fully resourced to operate effectively in that lead role. We also support such organisations partnering with non-Indigenous organisations, where effective and appropriate.

Sustaining well-resourced and properly supported Aboriginal community-controlled organisations is vital to sustaining Aboriginal communities.

Signed by

Name

Organisation

Position

Date

Cultural Principles and Protocols Guide



Published by the South
Australian Aboriginal
Coalition for Social Justice

with support from the
South Australian Council
of Social Service

This document represents the combined knowledge and input of the members of SA Aboriginal Coalition for Social Justice (SAC SJ) and the South Australian NGO sector.

The document is a guide to help the NGO sector engage with Aboriginal organisations and interest groups across South Australia (although its protocols are equally applicable to the government sector).

At the heart of community engagement is the need for the non-government sector to reach cultural competency; the principles outlined in the “A Cultural Inclusion Framework for SA” provide a very strong example of what this entails.

The Coalition commends this Guide to users, as well as the Cultural Inclusion checklist provided in Companion Document 3 of the Framework: dpc.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/pubimages/documents/aard/CIF_guide.pdf

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the diversity and cultural authorities of all Aboriginal people and communities within South Australia.

The voices of Elders are imperative to the preservation of Aboriginal culture and are integral in providing leadership and direction for our communities, and for our children's future.¹

Aboriginal-controlled organisations are vital to sustaining and invigorating Aboriginal communities and culture.

Respectful Relationships

An important part of showing respect for different cultures is acknowledging and accepting that we have different codes of behaviour and ways of interacting.

Working across cultures is not always easy and requires the patience, understanding and commitment of all parties.

While mistakes will inevitably be made, the attempt to observe the protocols of Aboriginal communities and organisations is appreciated by Indigenous people, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to, and respect for, Aboriginal culture, heritage and environment.²

Understanding the Landscape

South Australia has a diverse Aboriginal population across metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Aboriginal communities practice different languages, cultures and customs.

However: a key common element is that many Aboriginal communities and individuals have been deeply impacted by policies and practices that have resulted in the dislocation of Aboriginal people from their communities. It is important to acknowledge that these policies and practices continue to impact upon Aboriginal people today.

Aboriginal people have been the subject of many reports over the last 20 years. Many of these reports confirm the negative impact on Aboriginal people's health and wellbeing of dispossession and separation from land, erosion of culture and traditions, loss of family and kin, serious levels of disempowerment and disadvantage on all social indicators, and marginalisation within the dominant non-Aboriginal society.

Despite these challenges Aboriginal people continue to survive and maintain their culture.

Full economic independence and participation and Aboriginal self-determination are yet to be achieved for Aboriginal communities.

Many Aboriginal communities are in need of the services funded and allocated by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, and delivered by mainstream agencies, including NGOs.

We Share Common Values

The Coalition and NGO sector share common ground:

- We are all committed to working in partnership to enhance the quality of services being delivered to Aboriginal communities, particularly those most disadvantaged
- We aim to ensure all services are developed in partnership with local Aboriginal communities and organisations
- We advocate for services to foster community capacity building.

Our aim is for true self-determination, where all Aboriginal people in South Australia are empowered through inclusiveness at all stages of the development of services and programs, and at all levels of decision-making.

The Coalition is committed to increasing community capacity building within Aboriginal communities. Accordingly, we encourage the NGO sector to deliver its services and programs by providing funding to local Aboriginal community organisations, so they can strengthen their own self-governance.

We Aspire to Build Strong Partnerships

Shared values and the desire to build respectful relationships are a good basis for mainstream NGOs and Aboriginal-controlled organisations to build strong partnerships.

However to date competitive funding practices have made this difficult by undermining cooperative relationships throughout the community sector.

Local Aboriginal organisations have failed to flourish in this environment.

The Coalition recognises that there are a range of dynamics at play in relationships between NGOs and Aboriginal-controlled organisations and communities: some relationships are very positive and support Aboriginal organisations and people, but others do little to build the capacity of Aboriginal communities to overcome the significant social issues they face.

The Coalition expects that where the principles and protocols outlined here are followed, there will be improved relationships between mainstream and Aboriginal NGOs, and capacity building within Aboriginal communities will be more likely to take place.

Principles

Every community is different, and there is no set formula for capacity building, but it is possible to distil a common set of principles to guide development facilitators. Such principles include:

- Start from local conditions and existing plans, and build on community strengths and assets
- Design processes to maximise local participation, implementation, control and sustainability (use capacity building and action-learning processes)
- Value cultural strengths and work with cultural practices and preferences
- Be responsive to community needs, priorities, capacities and timeframes
- Integrate new initiatives with existing programs and services
- Forge real partnerships that feature shared responsibilities, power and mutual benefits
- Ensure skills transfer strategies to local people are built in when external experts are employed
- Provide flexible funding arrangements (with minimal red tape and duplication) that allow adjustments to expenditure and activities in response to learnings and changes in local circumstances
- Assess weaknesses and risks and provide support commensurate with those risks.

While these principles are applicable in any setting, the circumstances of Aboriginal Australians require additional considerations. For instance, the range and degree of socioeconomic disadvantages is broader and deeper than for non-indigenous communities, which means that Indigenous people can experience greater difficulties in acting collectively, organising effectively and managing local initiatives.

¹ SA Aboriginal Elders Executive Committee – A Cultural Inclusion Framework for SA

² Version 1. 2006 - EP Indigenous Protocols Document