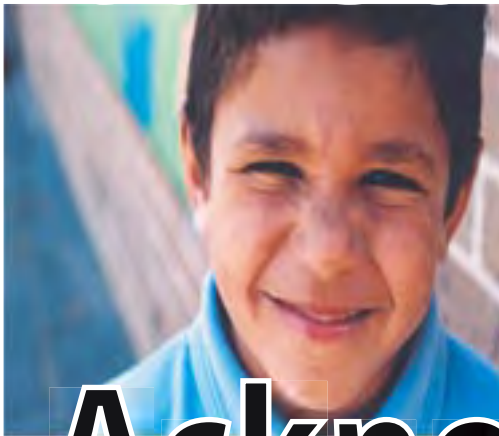
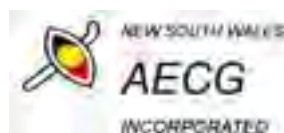


# Welcome to Country &



# Acknowledgement of Country

*Guidelines and Protocols for  
NSW Public Schools and  
TAFE NSW Institutes*



## ***A JOINT STATEMENT***


The New South Wales Department of Education and Training, the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG Inc.) and the New South Wales Teachers Federation in collaboration, are committed to a partnership in Aboriginal education.

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 attached documents provide information and guidelines for **Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country**.

### ***What is in the package:***

#### **Document 1 - NSW AECG Inc. Guidelines**

-  guidelines for the recognition and promotion of these protocols.

#### **Document 2 - Using these Protocols**

-  why we use these protocols;
-  how we use these protocols;
-  what the appropriate message to be conveyed should be, with examples of how these protocols can be used; and
-  who would be the most appropriate people to perform these protocols.

It is essential that these **protocols are used in consultation with the local Aboriginal community** to ensure local protocols are adhered to.

In conclusion, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training is committed to the process of Reconciliation and to being in active partnership with Aboriginal communities, in recognising Aboriginal people as the Custodians of this Land and ensuring that respect for Aboriginal culture is engendered in all Departmental activities.

We acknowledge those who have contributed to this package and the protocols: NSW Teachers Federation, Aboriginal Education Restricted Committee; NSW Teachers Federation Aboriginal Members Committee; NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.; and NSW Department of Education and Training, Aboriginal Programs Unit.



## Welcome to Country

The Traditional Custodians of the Land, usually a 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 culture and heritage and the ongoing relationship the Traditional Custodians have with the Land.

At the beginning 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" could be:

Example 1.

I would like to show my respect and Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land, of Elders past and present, on which this meeting takes place.

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 the Elders both past and present of the \_\_\_\_\_ Nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present.

Local Aboriginal organisations such as the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG Inc); NSW Aboriginal Land Council; Elders Council; DET, Aboriginal Programs Unit; etc, can provide advice as to the Traditional Custodians of the Land and Nations.

# Guidelines for the Recognition & Promotion of Aboriginal Culture & Custodianship of Country



*NSW Aboriginal Education  
Consultative Group  
Incorporated*











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## **GUIDELINES FOR THE RECOGNITION AND PROMOTION OF ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND CUSTODIANSHIP OF COUNTRY**

The New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Incorporated (NSW AECG Inc.) advocates the promotion of greater understanding of Aboriginal Culture in the wider community and endorses the use of appropriate Aboriginal protocols in schools, TAFE NSW Institutes, other education institutes, 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 Culture 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 culture.

The issues of valuing and respecting appropriate Aboriginal ceremony are pertinent 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 Culture in the wider community, the NSW AECG Inc. endorses the use of appropriate Aboriginal protocols and ceremonies.

### ***What is a Welcome to Country?***

A "Welcome to Country" is where the Traditional Aboriginal Custodians (in most cases the 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 (or representatives) 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 of the local Aboriginal community, or it can also include a performance of some description (which will vary according to region and locality). Performances can include a Traditional Welcoming Song, a Traditional Dance, didgeridoo performance or a combination of any of the above.

It is important that the Aboriginal representative (representatives) 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 that 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 and or Sea where the gathering of participants is being conducted.

"Acknowledgement of Country" is a respectful and yet not difficult practice to engage in. Acknowledgement of Country is a respectful means of Acknowledging that the event, meeting, school function, etc. is taking place on the Country of the Traditional Custodians.

Government, organisations and government 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 meeting, formal gathering, function, ceremony, or school event.

### ***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 process may not be simple; making the initial contact with the appropriate Traditional Custodians of the Country on which the meeting, event or function is to take place can incur some degree of effort. The initial connection process is often the most problematic and can take some time. Observing Aboriginal protocol will include allowing time for Traditional decision making and discussion among the Traditional Custodians.

The initial connection process can be given assistance by the Local and Regional AECG members. AECG members often have extensive experience in their local community and will be able to give assistance in the connection process. 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 Conservation, Parks and Wildlife Division Aboriginal Field Staff;
- Aboriginal Medical Services in your local area; and
- Department of Education and Training School Education Area or Regional Aboriginal Field Staff.

Not any Aboriginal person can give 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 the Traditional Custodians of an area are. 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 is 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 the relevant family;
- 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.



# Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country

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.

Importantly and most significantly please be reminded that the Aboriginal representative or representatives should be comfortable with the arrangements that have been 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 local Aboriginal Custodians and not a privilege.



*Using these Protocols*



## WELCOME TO COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

### *Why do we use these protocols?*

The process of "Welcome to Country" and "Acknowledgement of Country" recognises the unique position of Aboriginal people in Australian culture and history.

Aboriginal people are the Original Custodians of the Land. It is important this unique position is recognised and incorporated as part of official protocol and events to enable the wider community to share in Aboriginal Culture and Heritage, facilitating better relationships between Aboriginal people and the wider community.

By incorporating Aboriginal Acknowledgements and Ceremonies into official events and daily proceedings, schools and colleges can provide opportunities to recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal people's Culture and Heritage. They also communicate to the broader community the Cultural Heritage of Aboriginal people and promote mutual respect and understanding.

### *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 Area 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.

# Aboriginal Community Profile as part of the School/TAFE Community

**This profile is essential to complete, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, to ensure the protocols are implemented correctly**

The Aboriginal Country on which we stand is:

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The local Aboriginal Language is:

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Aboriginal sites in our community are:

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The local Aboriginal Elders in our community are:

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Notes

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