

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country policy

This is a mandated policy under the operational policy framework. Any edits to this policy must follow the process outlined on the [creating, updating and deleting operational policies](#) page.

1. Overview

This policy provides department requirements for:

- Welcome to Country
- Acknowledgment of Country
- Statements of Acknowledgment

2. Scope

This policy applies to all department staff in the conduct of meetings or events. The department is committed to recognising and respecting Aboriginal cultural practices and beliefs in every aspect of its work.

The policy reflects the vision and the goals outlined in the department's [Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2023 to 2026 \(RAP\) \(PDF 9 MB\)](#) and [Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019 to 2029 \(PDF 4 MB\)](#).



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4. Detail

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgment of Country are important cultural practices that recognise and respect the original custodians and traditional owners of the land. Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been part of Aboriginal cultures for thousands of years.

South Australia has a diverse Aboriginal population. Aboriginal groups have clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Traditionally, crossing into another group's Country would require a request for permission to enter. When permission was granted, the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey.

To recognise the traditional custodians of the land on which an event or meeting is being held is a commitment of the department towards building a strong, culturally responsive organisation as specified in [Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019 to 2029 \(PDF 4 MB\)](#).

Observing these practices connects the participants with Country and provides a culturally appropriate welcome to the place where people are meeting. It also reinforces the place of Aboriginal perspectives and decision making in the governance, design, and delivery of our services to optimise educational outcomes for all Aboriginal people.

There is a difference between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country.

A Welcome to Country is undertaken by the traditional owners. This can be by an Elder or Aboriginal person who has been given permission from traditional owners. Who this is depends on the event location.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be undertaken by any person and is an opportunity to show respect for traditional owners and the connection of Aboriginal people to Country. Some Aboriginal people may feel that it is more appropriate for them to deliver an Acknowledgement of Country, while others believe it is more powerful coming from a non-Aboriginal person. This can be guided by consulting with Aboriginal people at the site (such as families, students, and staff).

4.1 Welcome to Country

A Welcome to Country must be delivered at the commencement of all major internal and public events organised by the department. These include:

- significant events attended by Aboriginal Elders, Aboriginal community leaders, the Governor, Premier, Ministers, Members of Parliament, or representatives of other governments
- whole of department events such as launches and the announcements of new initiatives or significant regional events and forums
- community engagement events where members of the public or community representatives are present, including observances and commemorations and ceremonies and the opening of new schools or buildings
- at conferences and major seminars hosted by the department

- major events occurring annually on days of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including but not limited to:
 - National Apology Day, 13 February
 - National Close the Gap Day, third Thursday of March
 - National Sorry Day, 26 May
 - Anniversary of 1967 Referendum, 27 May
 - National Reconciliation Week, 27 May to 3 June
 - Mabo Day, 3 June
 - National NAIDOC Week, first week of July (Sunday to Sunday)
 - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day, 4 August
 - International Day of World’s Indigenous Peoples, 9 August
 - Indigenous Literacy Day, first Wednesday of September
 - Anniversary of UN Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 13 September
 - Human Rights Day, 10 December.

At these events:

- it is the responsibility of the event organiser to arrange a Welcome to Country. A respectful amount of advance notice must be given to allow sufficient preparation. A Welcome must be undertaken by an Aboriginal Elder, Traditional Owner, or Custodian of the land on which the event takes place. This person must have cultural authority within the Aboriginal community.
- the Welcome should be the first item of business
- associated costs and payments are to be confirmed in a timely manner between the event organiser and person conducting the Welcome prior to the event occurring
- the format is to be negotiated with the Elder or Traditional Owner and may include a short spoken statement, traditional singing, music such as a Yidaki, dancing, or a smoking ceremony.

There may be occasions where despite every effort being made, it is not possible to organise a Welcome to Country by an Aboriginal Elder or Traditional Owner. In these circumstances, an Acknowledgment of Country is the minimum requirement at the commencement of events listed above.

4.2 Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is a statement of recognition of the Traditional Owners of the Country and Lands where a meeting or event is being conducted.

It is when the host of a meeting or event acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which the meeting or event is being held and pays respect to past and present Elders, and other Aboriginal people attending the event.

Unlike the Welcome to Country, it can be undertaken by anyone, including an Aboriginal person from another Country or community.

A chair or event host will begin an event or meeting by acknowledging that it is taking place on the Country of the Traditional Owners.

An Acknowledgment of Country can be given at the commencement of a meeting or occasion of any kind, but should be given:

- as the formal response of the speaker who follows immediately after a Welcome to Country
- at whole of agency events such as launches and announcements or significant regional or local staff events and forums
- at the commencement of formal departmental meetings, including Senior Executive Group meetings
- at all public events
- at conferences, forums, seminars, and ceremonies hosted by the department.

It is preferred practice that an Acknowledgement of Country takes place at school assemblies and other major school events, meetings, and forums.

A single Acknowledgment of Country at the commencement of an event or meeting is sufficient. If subsequent speakers or presenters wish to add a personal Acknowledgment of Country at the beginning of their presentation, this should be confirmed beforehand with the chair, event host, or meeting organiser.

4.2.1 Acknowledgement of Country outside the Kurna (Adelaide) region

In areas outside the Kurna (Adelaide) region, resources are available on Statements of Acknowledgement appropriate for Traditional Owners in their respective lands across South Australia. The Attorney-General's Department website provides links to [preferred wording for Statements of Acknowledgement \(PDF 86 KB\)](#) from Traditional Owners on their Country. Department staff and event organisers are encouraged to engage with Elders from local First Nations groups to ensure local Aboriginal community preferences are respected.

It is acknowledged that in some locations, boundaries of Aboriginal nation groups may overlap or not be settled. In these instances, the Attorney-General's Department has recommended that the following General Statement of Acknowledgment is used:

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are present today.

Aboriginal Education staff working within the local community may be able to provide further guidance and assistance on protocols for Statements of Acknowledgement in the local context. Local Aboriginal community organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations may also be able to provide guidance.

4.2.2 Acknowledgement of Country in the Kurna (Adelaide) region

The example Statement of Acknowledgement in the Kurna region may be useful for schools in Adelaide. Schools outside Adelaide must develop statements in consultation with local cultural authorities that reflect the language and culture of the group where they are located.

4.2.2.1 Kurna (Adelaide) region Acknowledgement in English

We acknowledge this land that we meet on today is the traditional lands for the Kurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their country.

We also acknowledge the Kurna people, as the custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kurna people today.

We also pay respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal people visiting/attending from other areas of South Australia/Australia.

4.3 Acknowledging Country in documents, websites, audio visual material, and signage

Through consultation with the Aboriginal community and representative bodies, and through the Attorney General's Department, the South Australian government has developed formal Statements of Acknowledgement.

A Statement of Acknowledgement should be:

- on printed documentation such as published reports, strategies and agendas, including as part of the department's templates
- included in a prominent position on school web sites, such as the introductory page
- available for staff to display in email signature blocks and on screensavers
- displayed as a plaque or formal sign in our office buildings. It must be at an appropriate location at or near the school entrance, or within the main front office or main foyer.

Artwork or imagery can accompany a Statement of Acknowledgement if you have the artist or creator's consent, provided they are credited unless agreed otherwise, following the [consent to use media and creative work procedure \(PDF 192 KB\)](#) (staff login required).

If it is desired to form a long-term association with the selected artwork or imagery, or if the artwork or imagery is proposed to be used in a way that makes it difficult or expensive to remove (as would be required if an artist or owner withdraws consent) then it is highly recommended that a suitable payment and long-term binding licence agreement with the artist or owner should be negotiated.

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Department staff

Be aware of and follow the Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country protocols as outlined in the policy.

5.2 Aboriginal Education Directorate

Provide advice as appropriate.

Monitor, evaluate, and review this document in line with the operational policy framework.

6. Definitions

6.1 Aboriginal

The department uses the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This is the term preferred by most Aboriginal people in South Australia. It is not intended to exclude people who identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or people who identify as Torres Strait Islander.

6.2 formal event

All major internal and public events organised by the department including conferences, forums, and launches, as set out in this policy. Examples include but are not limited to ceremonial occasions, observances, academic presentations, and official events.

6.3 meetings

Official departmental openings, forums (where there is an agenda and minutes) including school assemblies. Examples include but are not limited to regular and special school assemblies, gatherings, staff meetings, student forum gatherings, and meetings of the school.

7. Supporting information

For advice or support on the department's communications processes, please refer to the [communications policy \(PDF 184 KB\)](#) (staff login required) or contact the Communications Directorate.

Information on Aboriginal languages is available from the [Manager, Aboriginal Languages, Curriculum and Learning Division](#).

For information on cultural protocols, the [Aboriginal Education Directorate](#) can be contacted for advice. The [Culturally Responsive Framework \(PDF 10 MB\)](#) outlines how we can all contribute to creating environments where Aboriginal people can work, learn and thrive.

The Attorney-General's Department has provided information through its website on the recommended forms Acknowledgement of Country should take, in the Kurna (Adelaide) region, across other parts of South Australia, and in areas where native title claims have not been resolved.

7.1 Related legislation

Nil.

7.2 Related policies

[Aboriginal Education Strategy 2019 to 2029 \(PDF 4 MB\)](#)

[Communications policy \(PDF 184 KB\)](#) (staff login required)

[Consent to use media and creative work procedure \(PDF 192 KB\)](#) (staff login required)

[Culturally Responsive Framework \(PDF 10 MB\)](#)

Attorney-General's Department: [Statement of Acknowledgement and Welcome to Country](#)

[Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2023 to 2026 \(PDF 10 MB\)](#)

[Workforce Strategy on a page \(PDF 253 KB\)](#)

8. Record history

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8.1 Approvals

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Policy sponsor: Director, Aboriginal Education

Responsible Executive Director: Executive Director, Curriculum and Learning

Approved by: Director, Aboriginal Education

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8.2 Revision record

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Approved date: 8 October 2025

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Amendment(s): Clarified difference between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country. Clarified how a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country should occur. Clarified Acknowledging Country in documents, websites, audio-visual material, and signage.

Version: 1.1

Approved by: Director, Aboriginal Education

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Version: 1.0

Approved by: Executive Director, Curriculum and Learning

Approved date: 30 April 2021

Next review date: 30 April 2024

Amendment(s): New policy.

9. Contact

Aboriginal Education Directorate

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