

CIT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURAL PROTOCOLS





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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE CIT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

Acknowledgement of Country

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) acknowledges the Ngunnawal People as Traditional Custodians of the ACT and surrounding region and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing cultures and the contribution they make to the life of this city and region.

Introduction to the Cultural Protocols

At CIT, we recognise and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as the oldest continuous cultures in the world. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' deep spiritual connections with the lands and waters of their Country. We acknowledge the adaptability, strength, determination, and resilience of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, organisations, and communities.

We also acknowledge the lasting, intergenerational impact of land dispossession, attempted genocide, and government policies, particularly Protection, Segregation, and Assimilation, including the forced removal of children from their families. We recognise that this history has had a harmful and continuing impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families, and communities. As a consequence, we acknowledge that racism and systemic discrimination have contributed to the harm caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

CIT has a responsibility to be culturally respectful and ensure our educational and business processes and practices enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to experience cultural safety and educational and career success. Key to building cultural awareness, safety, and integrity across CIT is first ensuring that:

- All CIT staff are equipped to understand and adhere to these Cultural Protocols.
- CIT provides a platform for diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in the education of and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT and surrounding region which is key to creating this change.

The Protocols will be a living document, reviewed annually and updated as required, in response to changes in legislation, ACTPS protocols, or community needs. CIT understands that there is no perfect Protocols document, affirms our commitment to continually learning, adapting, and listening to diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to ensure it remains relevant, respectful, and responsive. Applying these protocols is a core priority for CIT, ensuring all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, and communities experience CIT as culturally safe, inclusive, and supportive.

Context for the Cultural Protocols

For CIT, the introduction of organisational Cultural Protocols is a vital component of our strategic vision, deeply aligned with our commitment to Excellence, Integrity, Wellbeing, Belonging, Connection to Country, and our Student-Centric ethos.¹ These Protocols form a cornerstone of our governance and decision-making processes, ensuring CIT remains a place where every individual feels a sense of connection to our community, to Country, and to one another.

As a living document, the Protocols will continuously evolve in response to changes in government policies, protocols, and legislation, ensuring our actions remain relevant, respectful, and impactful as we progress. This dynamic framework provides a crucial opportunity to strengthen and affirm our commitment to:

- **Reconciliation and Respect:** CIT is committed to ongoing reconciliation for reconciliation and actively contributing to the ongoing process of healing, learning, and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-

¹ Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT). (2025). [CIT Strategic Plan: The Next 10 Years 2025-2035](#).



First Nations people and communities, including through the [CIT 2025-2026 Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan \(RAP\)](#).

- **Cultural Awareness:** CIT is committed to respecting and honouring the diverse cultural practices of the Traditional Custodians of the ACT and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, to create a culture of belonging for all.
- **CIT's reputation with community and industry:** CIT strives to be recognised as a responsible, ethical, and culturally respectful vocational education institution that prioritises the safety, wellbeing, and cultural integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students, ensuring that our commitment to inclusion is visible both within the community and across industry sectors. CIT is dedicated to the ongoing building of cultural awareness and respect across our networks, and will lead by example, continually learning, evolving, and enhancing our cultural awareness and integrity, driving positive change within the broader community and industry.
- **Quality education reputation:** CIT is committed to providing a high-quality, inclusive education that integrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and knowledge throughout course content, ensuring our students experience the breadth and depth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in course content wherever practicable.
- **Long-term partnerships:** CIT is committed to building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. We will work to create partnerships that are grounded in respect, listening, collaboration, and a shared vision for progress.
- **Legal and ethical obligations:** CIT remains dedicated to fulfilling its legal and ethical obligations, ensuring alignment with national and ACTPS initiatives, including the [ACT Indigenous Protocol](#), [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), [Intellectual Property and Indigenous Knowledge Protocols](#), [Human Rights Act \(ACT\) 2004](#), [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Agreement 2019-2028](#) and [Work Health and Safety Act 2021](#).

How to Use These Cultural Protocols?

This document will serve as a foundational resource for CIT, guiding engagement and communication that help ensure respectful and appropriate interactions with students, partners, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Development of the Cultural Protocols

To strengthen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, CIT partnered with Burbangana Group, a one hundred per cent Aboriginal-owned consultancy firm to assist in the development of the CIT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols document in consultation with the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians of the ACT and other respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and individuals who reside in the ACT and surrounding region. The knowledgeable, empathetic, and patient Burbangana Group consultants, Rod Little, Marg Cranney, and Karel Williams guided CIT in this collaborative, consultative process, which took place over 2024 and into 2025.

For the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people consulted in this project, CIT was perceived to have a unique opportunity to:

- Develop and demonstrate excellence and leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education.
- Establish CIT as a leader in the effective engagement and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities, and businesses.
- Influence workplace standards, striving to create workplaces in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff experience cultural safety.

There was a stipulation that this work should be built on pillars of reciprocity, humility, truth telling, recognition, respect, relationships, inclusivity, healing, cultural safety, and accountability, including the use of evidence and data to monitor progress.



CIT’s Commitments to Inclusion, Reconciliation, and Building Cultural Safety

At CIT, we recognise that embracing cultural diversity strengthens our identity and impact. These Cultural Protocols, along with our ongoing work in reconciliation and equity, support our commitment to Excellence, Integrity, Wellbeing, Belonging, and Connection. We aim to build strong partnerships and create an environment where everyone feels respected, included, and connected to both each other and Country. Aligned with our **Student-Centric** vision, we prioritise creating an environment free from discrimination, where all students experience cultural safety, equity, and belonging.

As a learning community, we are committed to continuous learning, reflection, and improvement to enhance our skills and understanding. Every CIT staff member contributes by learning, practising, modelling best practice, and advocating for positive change.

CIT Governance and Stewardship of the Cultural Protocols

This Cultural Protocols document is governed by CIT’s Reconciliation Working Group, with oversight from relevant senior leadership. They will be formally reviewed on an annual basis and updated as required in response to legislative changes, ACTPS protocol updates, or emerging community needs. Any updates will be communicated to all CIT staff, students, and stakeholders. CIT remains committed to ensuring that these Protocols evolve in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices.

PROTOCOL GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

Protocol No: v0.1

Approved: April 2025

Next Review: April 2026

Category: Corporate Policies/Protocols

Protocol/Policy Owner: Executive Director, Corporate Services

Please note: The CIT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols PDF is at a point in time, please see CIT SharePoint for the most up to date information.



CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING, RESPECTING, AND USING THE PROTOCOLS ACROSS CIT

What are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols?

Cultural Protocols serve as etiquette guidelines for ensuring cultural integrity and fostering respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, families, communities, and organisations.

They are designed to help establish meaningful partnerships and support inclusive practices. This guide is primarily for CIT staff, providing clear direction on how we engage with students, community members, industry partners, other directorates, and key organisations. While the Cultural Protocols are relevant to all stakeholders, their main purpose is to guide staff in building respectful and culturally safe interactions across all areas of CIT's work.

The Importance of Observing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the right to live healthy, safe, and empowered lives with strong connections to culture and Country. This includes having access to both high quality learning opportunities and a culturally respectful and safe educational environment, in which all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience safety, belonging, and educational and career success.

Additionally, observing these protocols aligns with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap by supporting the recognition and respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and rights within educational institutions. It ensures TAFEs meet their obligations to promote cultural safety, inclusion, and partnership with all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, contributing to the goals of improving education outcomes and addressing systemic inequities. By implementing these protocols, CIT is playing an active role in closing the gap and advancing reconciliation.

Compliance with ACT Government Protocols and Policies

CIT, as an authority established by the ACT Government, recognises the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional Custodians of the ACT and surrounding region. CIT also recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region and acknowledges other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who live, work, and study on these lands.

As an authority established by the ACT Government, CIT and its staff must also adhere to all Whole of Government Protocols and Policies.

For comprehensive guidance on the Whole of Government Protocols and Policies, CIT staff should refer to the designated resource available below. Please note that these protocols and policies are subject to change, and it is important to ensure we are using the latest guidelines.

- [ACT Indigenous Protocol \(Interim\)](#)

CIT Yurauna's Important Role at CIT

CIT Yurauna plays a significant role in supporting First Nations students and actively contributes to the development of enduring relationships with the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations for the benefit of students and the community.

CIT Yurauna is both a College and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Educational Centre of Excellence that provides tailored Aboriginal courses, study support, and cultural advice to students and community. CIT Yurauna provides



teaching and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across a broad range of programs and implements a community engagement model, specifically designed to build cultural connections, individual capacity, and community networks for education and employment outcomes for students in a culturally safe environment.

It is not the role of CIT Yurauna staff to support core CIT business-enabling services, such as Finance, HR (recruitment, training, pay/conditions), marketing, communications, research, and consultation/policy advice not directly related to the College's core functions, as this reduces their capacity to provide quality services, education, and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the community.

It is imperative that all CIT staff respect the workload, Cultural (Colonial) Load, and Cultural Responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including staff at CIT Yurauna, and refrain from expecting them to take on additional tasks beyond their designated roles.



CHAPTER 3: THE DIVERSE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER IDENTITIES, CULTURES, AND HISTORIES OF AUSTRALIA AND THE ACT REGION

This chapter offers staff a brief overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities, histories, and cultures, covering:

- The Traditional Custodians of the ACT, including the Ngunnawal and other local Peoples and families.
- The diversity of experiences within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- The lasting impacts of colonisation, racism, and the Stolen Generations
- The additional cultural and familial responsibilities of First Nations people, including Cultural (Colonial) Load

This introduction highlights the complexities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia and the importance of following protocols. It is not a substitute for ongoing, meaningful cultural awareness training and independent research.

First Nations Peoples of Australia

The First Peoples of Australia, known as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have inhabited the land for over 65,000 years. They each have unique cultures, languages, ceremonies, and deep connections to Country and waterways. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse, with distinct values, traditions, and ways of living. It is important to recognise that individuals within these communities are not the same, and blanket assumptions should be avoided. While there is significant diversity, shared cultural characteristics bind these communities through common history and experiences. Understanding these cultural characteristics and appreciating their impact for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people today is a cornerstone of developing cultural competence.

Identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Since the 1960s, Australian governments have defined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for legal and administrative purposes. The current definition consists of three parts, known as the “tri-partite test”:

- A person of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.
- A person who identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- A person who is accepted as such by the community in which they live or from which they descend.

Under the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Act 2008*², individuals have the right to self-identify or not disclose their status. CIT staff must not assume or report someone’s status, respecting their right to choose based on personal, cultural, or historical reasons.

Staff and students are more likely to self-identify in a safe, non-discriminatory environment. Therefore, it is crucial for CIT to provide a welcoming, inclusive space and ensure a culturally competent workforce.

Aboriginal Peoples

Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is made up of around 250 distinct language groups, each with its own laws, customs, practices, ceremonies, and beliefs. This cultural diversity spans the country, with contemporary Aboriginal cultures blending traditional practices with modern innovations.

Aboriginal communities contribute significantly to Australian and global society, influencing areas such as land management, community development, pharmacology, language, art, and performance. Traditional techniques are reimagined in innovative ways, and Aboriginal leaders play a key role in advocating for social justice, political change, and environmental stewardship.

² ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB). (2019). [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body Agreement 2019-2028](#).



Aboriginal cultures are celebrated through initiatives that promote language preservation, cultural education, and economic development. By integrating ancient knowledge with contemporary influences, Aboriginal Peoples continue to enrich Australian society and foster greater understanding of their cultural legacy.



This map attempts to represent the language, social, or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. It shows only the general locations of larger groupings of people which may include clans, dialects, or individual languages in a group. It used published resources from the eighteenth century-1994 and is not intended to be exact, nor the boundaries fixed. It is not suitable for native title or other land claims. David R Horton (creator), © AIATSIS, 1996. No reproduction without permission (AIATSIS).

Torres Strait Islander Peoples

In 1989, Torres Strait Islander people adopted the term Zenadth Kes (pronounced zen-ath-kes) to refer to the geographical area known in English as the Torres Strait.³

- **ZE** – Zey (South)
- **NA** – Naygay (North)
- **D** – Dagam (Place/Side)
- **TH** – Thawathaw (Coastline)
- **KES** – Kes (Passage/Channel/Waterway)

The Torres Strait consists of 15 island communities spread across at least 274 small islands between Cape York Peninsula and Papua New Guinea, covering 48,000 km², with a total land area of 566 km².

Today, over 4,500 Torres Strait Islanders live on the islands, and more than 28,000 reside across Australia, mostly in Queensland and New South Wales. Modern Torres Strait Islander culture is vibrant, with significant contributions to Australian society. The Zenadth Kes diaspora plays a key role in preserving cultural heritage while engaging in political and community affairs. Their influence spans the arts, where traditional and contemporary practices blend, and politics, where Traditional Custodians advocate for greater recognition of their contributions, land rights, social issues, legislative changes, and strengthening community.

Christianity is central to Zenadth Kes culture, shaping community and cultural identity. The culture emphasises belonging, with strong connections fostered both locally and nationally. Efforts to preserve languages, traditions, and customs continue to enrich Australia's cultural landscape, promoting greater understanding and respect for Zenadth Kes heritage.

³ Bani, E. (n.d). [Zenadth Kes Acronym \(tsirc.qld.gov.au\)](https://tsirc.qld.gov.au/)



Source: Torres Strait Island Regional Authority <https://torstrarc.recruitmenthub.com.au/About-Us/>

Historical Impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identities

Historical impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities must consider the forced removal of children, known as the ([The Stolen Generations](#)). This policy severed cultural, spiritual, and familial and community ties, affecting many individuals, families, and communities, leaving lasting intergenerational trauma.

Survivors and descendants often spend years searching for information to reconnect with Country, family, culture, and ancestors. The national Link-Up program offers family tracing and reunion services, while the AIATSIS [Family History Unit](#) provides advice on locating family history sources. However, these searches do not always result in the hoped-for reconnection. [The Healing Foundation](#) works with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by the forced removal of children. The [Bringing Them Home report](#), released in April 1997, documented the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families in Australia.

ACTPS Government Recognition of Traditional Custodianship in the ACT

ACT Indigenous Protocol (Interim)

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.

In 2002, the Territory acted in good faith on the advice of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to develop its approach to acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians. The Territory acknowledges the right of Aboriginal people to self-determination and recognises that there is re-emerging knowledge about their history and connections with the land. The Territory acknowledges that those identifying as Ngambri (Kamberri) have determined they are Traditional Custodians of land within the ACT and surrounding region.

As an initial step in our journey towards healing and Treaty, it is the Territory's intention to seek community input to any further changes to the protocol through a consultation and engagement process, which commenced in early 2023.⁴

The Ngunnawal Peoples of the ACT and Surrounding Region

The Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians have a deep cultural, spiritual, and historical connection to the region, with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC) affirming that their ancestral ties to the Canberra area span tens of thousands of years, maintaining both tangible and intangible links to the land and waters.⁵ Ngunnawal Country is defined more

⁴ ACT Government. (2024). [ACT Indigenous Protocol \(Interim\)](#).

⁵ United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC). (2024). [The Ngunnawal: Who We Are](#).



by the language of its people than by geographical boundaries, covering areas from Yass to Boorowa, Coolac, the highlands west of the Shoalhaven, and Goulburn. map.⁶⁷

United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC)

The United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC) is a local Aboriginal body that provides advice to the ACT Government in relation to heritage and connection to land matters for the Ngunnawal people. The Council is made up of representatives nominated by each of the Ngunnawal family groups and meets up to four times per year in Canberra.

The Council gives advice to the:

- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.
- ACT Government about heritage and connection to land for the Ngunnawal People.

UNEC's work is guided by the UNEC Charter (2003).

The UNEC Charter (2003)

Our Unity is a journey of healing. We have taken the first big step and along the path people will join us (and leave), but everyone is welcome.

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

- *That our Elders have our respect. We are honoured by their giving respect back. We acknowledge them for assuming responsibility as leaders in our community.*
- *We need to come together to create our future – one in which everyone has a place where they can feel proud, have dignity, and feel they belong.*
- *That communication is everything and we do this in a supportive way to know more about each other, our history, and our culture. These knowledges we make are ours together, although it belongs not only to us, but it's also for our kids and grandkids too. And it is for them that we do this work now.*
- *It takes courage to do work for the greater good. We need to learn how to solve problems, include not isolate, to listen with our hearts and speak from our souls.*
- *In being courageous we are a direct link back to the Dreamtime. This is the essence of Aboriginality, as is our relationship to the land.*
- *In this Journey we strive for Unity. We do this by empowering people, creating confidence, self-esteem, and room for difference so we can work and laugh together, moving forward all the while.*
- *We, each and every one of us, want this: not only for ourselves and our families. We want this, too, for people who need it the most.⁸*

Earliest Aboriginal Inhabitants of the ACT Region

Carbon dating indicates that Aboriginal people have inhabited the ACT region for at least 21,000 years, dating back to the Ice Age.⁹ This highlights the resilience, adaptability, and ingenuity of Aboriginal Peoples in adapting to and thriving in changing and often harsh conditions. This era is known as pre-history, a time period before written records existed. Combined with the disruption and displacement of Aboriginal communities during colonisation, the exact identities and territories of the earliest Aboriginal inhabitants of the ACT will likely never be known for certain. From the archaeological sites excavated in the region, it is believed that the natural grasslands and rock shelters provided abundant resources, and the Murrumbidgee river, fed by the valley's high peaks, provided an environment that was

⁶ Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). (1996). [The AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia](#).

⁷ Matthews, R.H. (1904). Ethnological notes on the Aboriginal Tribes of NSW and Victoria in *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of NSW* (Vol:38, pp. 203-381) and Kwok, F. (2013). [Considering Traditional Aboriginal Affiliations in the ACT Region \(Draft Report\)](#).

⁸ United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC). (2003). [United Ngunnawal Elders Charter](#).

⁹ Myers, D.M. (2010). [Lairds, Lags, and Larrikins: An Early History of the Limestone Plains](#).



able to support human life across millennia.¹⁰ There is also evidence that the ACT served as a place for gathering food, including migratory bogong moths.¹¹ While we may never know the full history of the earliest Aboriginal people of the region, we do know that Early European settlers referred to the local Aboriginal people as the 'Kamberra', 'Kghambury', 'Nganbra', and 'Gnabra', names that likely influenced the anglicised version, 'Canberra', meaning 'meeting place'.¹²

Local ACT Aboriginal Literature

To learn more, the ACT Heritage Library offers a curated collection of resources on the histories, cultures, and peoples of the ACT region. This includes books by and about local Aboriginal Peoples, as well as histories and cultural materials. For specific resources, visit the ACT Heritage Library's catalogue on [Aboriginal People of the ACT - Libraries ACT](#).

- [Gundungurra People](#)
- [Ngambri People](#)
- [Ngarigu People](#)
- [Ngunnawal People](#)
- [Wiradjuri People](#)
- [Yuin People](#)

Understanding the Complexity of Traditional Custodianship in the ACT and Australia

Disputes over land rights and Traditional Custodianship are a global issue, often arising from the impacts of colonisation and displacement, which have severed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' connection to their ancestral lands.¹³ These disputes are deeply rooted in complex histories and cultural practices. CIT staff must approach them with sensitivity and neutrality, respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' perspectives and self-determination, actively ensuring decisions are guided by cultural authorities¹⁴ and in accordance with ACTPS protocols.

The ACT Government recognises the Ngunnawal people as Traditional Custodians of the ACT, though the Ngambri people have also sought recognition¹⁵. In 2023, the ACT Government formally apologised to the Ngambri people for historical harms, which was seen as a significant step toward reconciliation for Ngambri people.¹⁶ However, this apology raised concerns within the Ngunnawal community and is being challenged.¹⁷ This situation underscores the complexities of recognising Traditional Custodianship in the ACT, Australia, and globally, where diverse perspectives must be respected while fostering impartiality and inclusive dialogue that honours all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

ACT's Diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population

The ACT and CIT are enriched by a diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, with people from across Australia bringing unique cultural practices, knowledge, and histories. In addition to the Ngunnawal Traditional Custodians, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples from various nations live here, drawn by opportunities

¹⁰ ACT Government. (2014). *Ngunnawal Plant Use: A Traditional Plant Use Guide for the ACT Region*.

¹¹ ACT Government. (2014). *Ngunnawal Plant Use: A Traditional Plant Use Guide for the ACT Region*.

¹² Gillespie, L. (1991). *Canberra 1820-1913*, AGPS and Gillespie, L. (1992). *Ginninderra Forerunner to Canberra* (Self-Published), Fitzgerald, A. (1987). *Canberra in Two Centuries*.

¹³ Greenwood, M. and Lindsay, N.M. (2019). [A Commentary on Land, Health, and Indigenous Knowledge\(s\)](#) in *Global Health Promotion* (Vol: 26) and Kwok, F. (2013). [Considering Traditional Aboriginal Affiliations in the ACT Region \(Draft Report\)](#).

¹⁴ Kwok, F. (2013). [Considering Traditional Aboriginal Affiliations in the ACT Region \(Draft Report\)](#).

¹⁵ ACT Government. (2024). [ACT Indigenous Protocol \(Interim\) and ACT Government. \(2023\). Joint Media Release – Statement regarding Supreme Court matter.](#)

¹⁶ [ACT Government. \(2023\). Joint Media Release – Statement regarding Supreme Court matter.](#)

¹⁷ Gore, C. (2023). [ACT Government Apologises to Canberra's Ngambri People for Failing to Recognise Them as Traditional Custodians](#) in *ABC News* (published 27 April 2023) and Roy, T. (2023). [Canberra's Ngunnawal Traditional Owners Call the ACT Government's Apology to the Ngambri people an 'affront'](#) in *ABC News* (published 4 May 2023).



in advocacy, government, and historical factors, including the forced removal from their ancestral lands. In the 2021 Census, 9,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were counted as the ACT, making up about 2% of the population.

Of the 9,000 people in the ACT who self-identified in the census as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander:

- 94.1% identified as Aboriginal.
- 2.6% identified as Torres Strait Islander.
- 3.4% identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- Wiradjuri people represented the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group in the ACT by population.

¹⁸

Languages Spoken in ACT

Of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Capital Territory:

- Most (90.7%) used only English at home.
- 2.9% used an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language at home.
- Of the 258 people who used Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander languages, the most common language spoken was Wiradjuri (31.0%).¹⁹

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in the ACT

CIT is committed to strengthening engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the ACT through culturally informed partnerships that promote equitable representation, provide appropriate support, and foster continued growth in participation in vocational education, training, and employment. **For more information on engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, communities, and businesses, see Chapter 6.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Councils and Reference Groups in the ACT and Surrounding Region

United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC): An Aboriginal organisation that provides advice to the ACT Government in relation to heritage and connection to land matters for the Ngunnawal people. For more information, see above section **The United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC), p. 10.**

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB): The **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body** has seven democratically elected members who represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, bringing their ideas and concerns to the ACT Government. It is a member of the **Coalition of Peaks**, which means it also has a national responsibility to help shape the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**.

ACT Reconciliation Council: An ACT Government body that promotes reconciliation across Canberra and encourages community conversations about the importance of reconciliation throughout the year.

Ngambri Local Aboriginal Land Council (NLALC): An Aboriginal organisation that represents the Ngambri people, including cultural recognition and land rights, community interests, Ngambri cultural ceremonies (including Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies).

Yerrabi Yurwang Child & Family Aboriginal Corporation is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Service that provides culturally appropriate support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

CIT's Diverse First Nations Staff and Students

CIT supports the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)** and is dedicated to providing equal access to education and training for all, regardless of background. Guided by our values of respect, equity, and inclusion, CIT strives to create a working and learning environment where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, and communities feel welcome, safe, and supported.

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2021). **Region Summary: Australian Capital Territory 2021.**

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2021). **2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People QuickStats.**



Located in the nation's capital and a hub for education, CIT is proud to have staff and students who identify as Ngunnawal, alongside many others from diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

In 2024, CIT trained 571 students who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and CIT Solutions trained 542, representing 7.6 per cent of the total student cohort. This proportion is significant when noting that not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students choose to self-identify and when considered against the wider ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. As of December 2024, CIT employed 26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, representing 2.9 per cent of the staff cohort, including eleven in identified positions. This number equates to approximately three per cent of CIT's total paid employee cohort. **For further information on identified positions, see Chapter 7, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identified Positions at CIT*.**

Additional Cultural and Familial Responsibilities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples often carry deeper familial and cultural responsibilities than those experienced by non-First Nations people. It is important for CIT staff to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship systems are complex and differ widely across groups and individuals. These systems often assign specific roles and duties based on factors such as gender, birth order, and cultural context. Additionally, due to the enduring impacts of colonisation and displacement, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have limited or no knowledge of their ancestral history, Country, or family connections. This loss of cultural continuity can be a deeply painful and traumatising experience, and staff should approach these issues with sensitivity and respect for the lived experiences of individuals, taking a trauma-informed approach.

Sorry Business

Sorry Business is a significant time of mourning for the death of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person that involves cultural practices, protocols, ceremonies, and rituals related to bereavement and funerals. It takes precedence over all other matters, with no set duration, as mourning can last weeks or months in some communities. Attending funerary rights is a vital part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and missing this can cause emotional distress and be seen as a sign of disrespect, with potential cultural consequences. Some communities and organisations may pause activities during Sorry Business, so it is important to contact individuals or communities beforehand and remain flexible.

Due to the impacts of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience a higher incidence of health challenges, lower life expectancy,²⁰ and increased rates of suicide,²¹ leading to more frequent periods of Sorry Business. CIT staff should be understanding and supportive of staff and students during these times.

Additionally, in many communities, approval must be sought from the family before using the name and/or image of a deceased person. Respect and sensitivity to these practices are crucial to cultural safety and integrity.

Staff Leave Entitlements for Sorry Business

For information on leave entitlements (in addition to bereavement leave) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff see the below section: *Additional Leave Provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff*.

Cultural (Colonial) Load

According to Diversity Council Australia, Cultural Load, sometimes referred to as Colonial Load, refers to the additional, often invisible, workload experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace, particularly

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2023). [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Life Expectancy](#).

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). [Deaths by Suicide Among First Nations People](#).



when there are very few other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the workplace. This is load placed both knowingly and unknowingly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by individuals, communities, workplaces, and institutions. This includes biases, assumptions, expectations, and entitlement held by non-First Nations people, with many unaware of the existence of this load. It is, however, highly visible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. The burden to carry this load is significant and can cause harm, lead to burnout, and impact negatively on an individual's ability to maintain their cultural responsibilities to their community.

Recently, the concept has been reframed into two categories: 'Cultural Responsibility' and 'Colonial Load'.²² This shift recognises that 'Cultural Load' often reflects the impact of colonialism and the Stolen Generations, rather than cultural responsibilities to Community and Country. Regardless of the terminology, CIT staff should be mindful of and respectful towards the additional burden this unfairly places on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students, and community members.

This includes, but is not limited to, an expectation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will:

- Educate colleagues, educators, and students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the impacts of racism.
- Provide ongoing cultural advice and feedback on all issues relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Conduct cultural ceremonies or provide services outside nominal role duties.
- Speak on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Participate in advisory committees, working groups, and boards.
- Experience systemic racism.
- Undertake unpaid work out of necessity to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives.²³

For more information on Cultural (Colonial) Load, the [ACTPS Cultural Transformation Branch resource](#).

Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Responsibilities and Addressing Cultural (Colonial) Load at CIT

CIT staff, supervisors, and Educators should be respectful of the impact of Cultural Responsibilities and Cultural (Colonial) Load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students. They should take steps to ensure they are not placing additional workload or cultural advice expectations on staff (outside their nominal role descriptions) or students (outside their course requirements). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also more likely to take on kinship care, with many staff and students also having experience in kinship care and/or the foster care system. Supervisors should support staff in balancing their cultural and caregiving responsibilities, while Educators should also offer understanding and support to students in similar circumstances. Supervisors and Educators should also support an open and safe space to discuss the cultural and caregiving responsibilities with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students and work together to support their accommodation.

Additional Leave Provisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff

CIT acknowledges the important cultural and community responsibilities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff bring to the workplace. Their identity and community connections are integral to their work, and they make valuable contributions to the ACT and region. The Enterprise Agreements for Educators and General Staff recognise specific entitlements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, supporting their cultural duties outside of regular office hours. CIT also acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff may face unique expectations tied to their cultural roles, and that various cultural factors may impact their lives. Supervisors and managers should work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to balance their cultural responsibilities with workplace duties, within operational requirements.

²² Weenthunga Health Network (2023). [Reframing 'Cultural Load'](#).

²³ Diversity Council of Australia. (2023). Retrieved from: [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: Leading Practice](#)



In addition to standard bereavement, adoption, and kinship care leave, CIT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are also able to access leave for the following purposes:

- **Leave to Attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ceremonies:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can take up to 10 days in any 2-year period to attend ceremonies related to family deaths or other cultural obligations, in addition to bereavement leave. This leave is paid at full rate and counts as service.
- **Leave to Attend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Attend Meetings:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff elected to the ACT peak body can take paid leave to attend meetings. If they receive a fee, leave is without pay, but out-of-pocket expenses can be reimbursed. The leave is paid at full rate and counts as service.
- **Leave to Attend NAIDOC Week Activities:** All CIT staff (excluding casuals) can take paid leave for up to one full day or equivalent periods during NAIDOC Week. The leave is subject to operational requirements, paid at full rate, and counts as service.

For more information, see pages 16-17, 95, 174 of the [ACT Public Sector Canberra Institute of Technology \(Educators\) Enterprise Agreement \(2023-2026\)](#) and pages 16-17, 115, 191 of the [ACT Public Sector Canberra Institute of Technology Enterprise Agreement \(2023-2026\)](#).

Ongoing Impacts of Racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Racism continues to have a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia. Systemic discrimination, prejudice, and the legacy of historical injustices contribute to ongoing socio-economic disparities, limited access to opportunities, and challenges in education, employment, and healthcare. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples face racism in many forms, from overt discrimination to more subtle biases embedded in institutional practices.

Importance of Anti-Racism to Combat Racism Against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

As a TAFE and government body, CIT is committed to the obligations set out in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, understanding its crucial role in addressing racism against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Through CIT's RAP commitments, IDEA Framework, and Decadal Strategy (2025-2035),

CIT understands it needs to go beyond Code of Conduct and Respectful Workplace Behaviours policy and actively tackle racism through a proactive, anti-racism stance by educating staff and students on the historical and ongoing impacts of racism, fostering greater awareness, empathy, and understanding. By working to embed anti-racism practices and education, CIT not only meets its reconciliation commitments, but also ensures CIT commits to ensuring all individuals, regardless of background, can belong, thrive, and contribute positively to society.

Resources to Support Inclusive Practice (Workplace and Classroom)

ACTPS Policies, Procedures, and Frameworks

ACTPS Integrity Framework	ACTPS Code of Conduct 2022
ACTPS Values and Signature Behaviours	ACTPS Resolving Workplace Issues Policy
ACTPS Respect, Equity and Diversity (RED) Framework	
ACTPS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Framework	

CIT Policies, Procedures, Strategies, and Frameworks

Students	Staff Only
CIT Student Conduct Policy	Resolving Staff Workplace Issues Policy
CIT Student Code of Conduct Policy	
CIT Student Equity Policy	



Whole of CIT	
CIT Strategic Plan: The Next 10 Years (2025-2035)	CIT 2025-2026 Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan
CIT 2024-2026 Gender Equity Action Plan	CIT Bullying and Harassment Prevention Policy
CIT Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Framework (internal document)	CIT Workplace Health and Safety Arrangements Policy

Related Acts

- [ACT Discrimination Act 1991 \(ACT\)](#)
- [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Commonwealth\)](#)
- [Public Sector Management Act 1994 \(ACT\)](#)

Anti-Racism Support Materials for Staff

- [The National Anti-Racism Framework Full Report 2024](#)
- [National Anti-Racism Framework | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Racism. It Stops with Me - Campaign Relaunch | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)
- [Racism. It Stops with Me – Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Toolkit](#)
- [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples | Australian Human Rights Commission](#)



CHAPTER 4: PROTOCOLS FOR RESPECTFUL TERMINOLOGY AND STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICE

Respectful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology Protocols

How we speak about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is as important as how we act. Language is itself active, can impact and shape attitudes, understanding, and relationships, and can have a real, lasting impact. When referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in discussions and documents, it is essential to use respectful, inclusive language and terminology. Doing so fosters a culturally safe and inclusive learning and working environment. As each individual or group may have different terminology preferences, it is also best practice and good manners to politely ask and respect the preferred terms.

Communicating with Respect

Capitalisation

As capitalisation demonstrates respect, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and specific nations or language groups such as Ngunnawal or Wiradjuri, should always be capitalised. Capitalisation conventions are often also considered appropriate to extend to terms such as:

Aboriginal	Torres Strait Islander	First Nations/Peoples	Elder(s)
Traditional Custodian	Traditional Owner	Ngunnawal Country	Country
Welcome to Country	Water Blessing	Names of cultural practices	

Note: It is not necessary to capitalise the term ‘reconciliation,’ unless referring to the name of Reconciliation Australia, or the name of a formal program or document such as your Reconciliation Action Plan.

Using Plural Terms: Acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diversity

For official documents, external media, and correspondence, CIT must use the ACTPS preferred term for speaking of both groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

CIT staff should note that some individuals may prefer ‘First Nations’ or ‘First Peoples’, as they encompass broader diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities, including those who prefer to be identified as Zenadth Kes.

Pluralisation should also extend to generalised reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ‘histories,’ ‘cultures,’ ‘perspectives,’ and ‘ways of being’. Using plurals acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are not homogenous, but diverse.

Use of the Term ‘Indigenous’

The term ‘Indigenous’ is offensive to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, as it has historically linked these groups to flora and fauna, rather than the human population. It also oversimplifies the diversity of identities by implying a homogenous label. ‘Indigenous’ should only be used when referring to official policies, strategies, protocols, organisations, or documents that contain this word. When you are referring generically to the original inhabitants of other continents, ‘indigenous’ should not be capitalised.

Use of Acronyms

It is never appropriate to use acronyms, such as “ATSI” or “FN” to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and many consider it very offensive due to past government policies and the impact this has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is, however, appropriate to use acronyms when referring to organisations, directorates, or bodies, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) or the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)



Unacceptable Terms

The terms ‘full-blood,’ ‘half-caste,’ and ‘quarter-caste’ should never be used as they are not only extremely offensive and outdated, but also racist and assimilationist. CIT staff should also refrain from the use of the following terms, as they can also reinforce negative stereotypes:

Aborigines	Disadvantaged	Native
Lost (languages, cultures)	Possessive language such as ‘our’ Indigenous/First Nations/Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people/population (unless being written by a First Nations author.	

For further guidance, the ACTPS Cultural Transformation Branch has created the following [Inclusive Language Guide: Glossary of Terms](#).



CHAPTER 5: PROTOCOLS FOR CULTURAL CEREMONIES AND EVENTS AT CIT

This chapter contains specific information about the Protocols for cultural ceremonies and events at CIT, including key information on the Cultural Protocols for a Welcome to Country, Smoking or Cleansing Ceremony, Water Blessing, and other cultural ceremonies in the ACT. It will also cover protocols for Acknowledgement of Country and organising cultural ceremonies and performances for events facilitated by CIT staff. CIT sought feedback from Ngunnawal Elders, including the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC) in the preparation of the following protocols.

What is a Welcome to Country?

The Welcome to Country protocol has been an integral part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. It honours Traditional Custodians and recognises the ancestral spirits who created the land, waters, and boundaries, allowing safe passage for visitors.

A Welcome to Country can only be given by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander who is a Traditional Custodian of the land and has the cultural authority to do so. Customs, language, and protocols vary across different groups, and adherence to the ACT region's cultural protocols demonstrates respect for the Traditional Custodians' heritage. The integrity of a Welcome to Country relies on its authenticity and can only be performed by an Elder or Traditional Custodian with cultural authority.

It is imperative for all CIT staff to understand that a Welcome to Country cannot be undertaken by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals from other nations, as each holds distinct traditions, stories, ancestral ties, and cultural authority to their Country.

There is currently no arrangement in place for CIT staff or students who are Traditional Custodians of the ACT to conduct a Welcome to Country or other cultural ceremonies. It is highly important for all CIT staff to understand that it is neither appropriate, nor their role, to be expected to conduct cultural ceremonies or performances for other areas of CIT. Should a CIT staff member or student be a Traditional Custodian of the ACT permitted to conduct such ceremonies, they must be asked through the appropriate channels and be remunerated.

Events which typically include a formal 'Welcome to Country' include:

- Commemorations and major festivals.
- Launches of CIT policies and programs.
- Conferences held or sponsored by CIT.
- International events held in Australia of which CIT is an organiser or sponsor.

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

Acknowledging that you are on the land of Traditional Custodians is a sign of respect which acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Custodianship of the land, paying respect to their ancestors and traditions. Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-First Nations peoples can show respect by doing an Acknowledgement of Country.

All official, public speeches by representatives of CIT must include an Acknowledgement of Country of the ACT as per the [ACTPS Indigenous Protocol \(Interim\)](#). CIT staff should always check that they are using the most current ACTPS Acknowledgement of Country, as this may change over time.

As a minimum requirement, at internal CIT events and online campaign launches, an Acknowledgement of Country will be made.



CIT Acknowledgement of Country (CIT PowerPoint Template):

CIT acknowledges the cultural host nation of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people, as Canberra's first inhabitants and Traditional Custodians of the ACT and Region. We recognise the special relationship and connection to Country the Ngunnawal people have with this area since time immemorial.

Prior to non-Indigenous arrival, Ngunnawal were a thriving community whose cultural practices were, and still are, core to their physical and spiritual wellbeing. We acknowledge the historical dispossession of the Ngunnawal people, and recognise the long-lasting, profound, and ongoing impact invasion has had on their health and wellbeing, livelihoods, cultural practices, families, and continuation of laws/lore.

CIT respectfully acknowledges the significant contribution of the Ngunnawal people to the life of Canberra.

We also acknowledge other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples who have made this place their home.

CIT Acknowledgement of Country for use in official CIT documents:

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as the Traditional and continuing Custodians and other Peoples and families with connection to the lands and waterways of the ACT region. We recognise the continuing relationship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with Country from time immemorial. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Australia's first inhabitants, leaders, teachers, and students whose cultural practices are still core to their physical and spiritual wellbeing.

We acknowledge the historical dispossession of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the long lasting, profound, and ongoing impacts that invasion has had on their lives and families.

We also respectfully acknowledge the significant contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the social and cultural life of Canberra and their historical and ongoing leadership at CIT.

Delivering a Personalised Acknowledgement of Country

It is common practice for an Acknowledgement of Country to explicitly acknowledge and pay respect to Elders, past and present. Staff doing an Acknowledgement of Country should take the time to learn about why an acknowledgement is done and connect with it personally, rather than reading a script verbatim, as this lacks authenticity. Over time, people who regularly deliver acknowledgements will develop their own style and approach which should incorporate compassion, empathy and sincerity. CIT staff who are confident in doing so are encouraged to consider crafting an acknowledgement that reflects the focus of the event.

Further Opportunities for Acknowledgment of Country

- Websites.
- Email signature blocks.
- Headers or Footers on CIT-branded documents.
- Business cards.

Acknowledgement of Country in Ngunnawal Language

CIT has been gifted use of the written text of the Acknowledgement of Country in the Ngunnawal language (i.e. in documents, presentations, and online). This was gifted to CIT by a senior Ngunnawal Elder.

CIT Staff with Permission to Deliver an Acknowledgement of Country in Ngunnawal Language

Generally, most CIT staff do not have the permission to read aloud the Ngunnawal language Acknowledgement of Country at the commencement of meetings, presentations, and events.

CIT staff may use an Acknowledgement of Country in the Ngunnawal language as an alternative to the standard Acknowledgement of Country, however this is strictly for those who have been granted explicit cultural permission by a Ngunnawal Elder, Traditional Custodian, or traditional knowledge holder with the cultural authority to grant this. This protocol must be followed to ensure cultural integrity and respect.



The Difference Between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country

The key difference between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country is the cultural authority of the individual. A Welcome to Country can only be performed by a Traditional Custodian of the land (Country) where the event is held. No one else has the authority to welcome others to a Country that is not theirs. In contrast, an Acknowledgement of Country can be made by anyone to show respect for the lands and Peoples where the event, meeting, or gathering takes place.

CIT Welcome to Country Protocol

In the ACT, a Welcome to Country can only be conducted by a Ngunnawal Elder or Traditional Custodian with the cultural authority to do so. Depending on their availability and the significance of the CIT event, a formal Welcome to Country may be organised. These ceremonies are deeply significant, and the Elder or Traditional Custodian will advise CIT on the most appropriate cultural ceremonies for the event, and their guidance should be respected whenever possible.

A Welcome to Country can take many forms and may include one or more of the following elements:

- A speech offering local history, cultural information, followed by a formal Welcome to Country for the guests.
- A cultural performance such as singing, dancing, storytelling, didgeridoo playing, clap sticks, or other instruments.
- Ceremonial practices like Water Blessings, acknowledgement of ancestors, weaving, or a Smoking or Cleansing Ceremony.

The Difference Between a Formal and Informal Welcome to Country

Formal Welcome to Country

As described above, a formal Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by the Ngunnawal Elder or ACT Traditional Custodian of the lands on which an event takes place and typically involves a formal speech or Welcome to Country ceremony. It must be arranged in advanced, and remuneration organised for the Ngunnawal Elder or ACT Traditional Custodian who conducts the formal Welcome to Country.

Informal Welcome to Country

An informal Welcome to Country can occur in more casual settings and may not follow a structured protocol, often initiated by a Ngunnawal person or ACT Traditional Custodian. It may include a simple greeting, brief acknowledgment of traditional ownership, or sharing stories about the land. These expressions of hospitality and respect are genuine, given freely by the individual at their discretion.

While both a formal and informal Welcome to Country acknowledge Traditional Custodianship, the formal Welcome to Country is a ceremonial practice for official events, whereas the informal version is spontaneous and can occur in everyday interactions at the discretion of the Traditional Custodian.

CIT staff should never ask Ngunnawal or any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff or students to conduct an informal Welcome to Country ceremony. CIT staff should never ask Ngunnawal or any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff or students to conduct an Acknowledgement to Country ceremony without appropriate or reasonable notice.

When to Have a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country

The distinction between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country is important, and it can cause considerable offence if they are confused. There are currently no firm rules to distinguish the events when it is preferable to have a Welcome to Country as opposed to an Acknowledgement of Country. However, for occasions of greater significance where members of the public, representatives of Governments, and/or the media are present, or



the event has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus, it is preferable to follow the below Welcome to Country Protocol wherever possible.

Other Cultural Ceremonies

Water Blessing Ceremony

The water blessing, passed down from ancestors, offers healing and hope from Nggunawal people to new arrivals on Country and can only be undertaken by a Nggunawal person or ACT Traditional Custodian with this specialised cultural knowledge and authority.

Smoking or Cleansing Ceremonies

Smoking ceremonies are an ancient tradition for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia that involve smouldering native plants to produce smoke which has significant ritual purification, cleansing, healing, strengthening, and spiritual renewal properties. In the ACT, this can only be undertaken by a Nggunawal person or ACT Traditional Custodian with this specialised cultural knowledge and authority.

How to Organise a Welcome to Country, Smoking or Cleansing Ceremony, Water Blessing, or Other Cultural Ceremony or Performance

Organising Events for CIT

CIT staff can contact the CIT Workplace Inclusion team in the People and Culture Branch on email: HumanResources@cit.edu.au for guidance on organising a Welcome to Country or other First Nations cultural ceremonies or performances for events facilitated by CIT.

CIT External Partner Events

At events which are not official CIT events, but where CIT is a major sponsor or partner, negotiations should be undertaken with the event organiser to encourage the incorporation of a formal Welcome to Country into the event, where possible and where a Nggunawal Elder and/or Traditional Custodian has advised it is appropriate to do so.

Cultural Ceremonies and Performances Delivered by Traditional Custodians and/or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Staff and Students at CIT

It is highly important for all CIT staff to understand that while there are Nggunawal, Traditional Custodians, and/or other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working and studying at CIT, it is neither appropriate, nor their role, to conduct formal cultural ceremonies or performances for CIT. There is currently no arrangement in place for CIT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to provide a Welcome to Country or other cultural ceremonies as part of their substantive role. Should a CIT staff member or student be a Nggunawal Elder or Traditional Custodian of the ACT permitted to conduct such ceremonies, they must still be appropriately remunerated if asked to formally provide these cultural services. CIT staff should be aware of the impact of their requests for cultural services, feedback, and advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students and consider the additional workload and Cultural (Colonial) Load that this places upon individuals. CIT Yurauna fields a high number of staff requests that are often outside the remit of the College and contributes to an increase in staff workload and Cultural (Colonial) Load.

Other Cultural Performances

Engagement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander yidaki (didgeridoo) players, dancers, cultural knowledge holders, or other artistic/musical performers is a significant way to highlight local Aboriginal culture and the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the ACT and region.

When planning events, CIT staff should, wherever possible, seek out cultural performances from the Traditional Custodians of the ACT. Some practitioners can be found on the [UNEC Website](#) or searching on [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise Search - Procurement ACT](#) for cultural performance artist in the Canberra. Staff can also contact the Workplace Inclusion Team in People in Culture at HRInbox@cit.edu.au.



Recommended Fees for Cultural Services

CIT is committed to appropriately remunerating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for cultural services, such as Welcome to Country, performances, and ceremonies. Performing these cultural services involve sharing their time and specialised cultural knowledge.

Payment should be arranged directly between the event organiser and the cultural services provider, considering factors like speaker/performance length, performance fees, travel, and the event's public profile.

Cultural services should be valued with respect and care, and the event budget should not dictate their worth. Traditional Custodians have the right to set their own fees for exercising cultural authority. Prices for these services, e.g. a simple Welcome to Country by a single speaker is likely to start at \$500 and may vary considerably based on Elder seniority, event scale, and other factors. It is never appropriate or respectful for event organisers to attempt to negotiate reduced fees with cultural services providers.

Flag Protocols for Events at CIT

At events at which flags are shown, the order of display, from an audience perspective from left to right: the Australian flag, the Territory flag, the Aboriginal flag, and the Torres Strait Islander flag. **For further information about Protocols for Flags, see Chapter 6: Protocols for Flying and Lowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags on CIT Buildings, page 25.**



CHAPTER 6: PROTOCOLS FOR FLYING AND LOWERING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FLAGS ON CIT BUILDINGS

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are symbols of unity, identity, and resilience, recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Traditional Custodians as caretakers of the land and waters. It is essential to display these flags respectfully, demonstrating CIT's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

On CIT buildings, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags should be flown on separate flagpoles, if available, alongside or near the Australian National Flag. If only one flagpole is available, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags should not replace the Australian National Flag. If two flagpoles are available, it is at the discretion of CIT to determine which flag should be flown with the Australian National Flag. CIT Facilities are responsible for managing the flying and lowering of the flags at all CIT campuses.

Protocols for Flag Lowering

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags at half-mast is a mark of respect and mourning for significant events or individuals within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or broader society.

Criteria for Flag Lowering

- **National Tragedies:** Following national tragedies that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, such as natural disasters, significant loss of life, or acts of violence.
- **Passing of Distinguished Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders or Individuals:** Upon the passing of distinguished Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, leaders, activists, or significant figures who have made notable contributions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, culture, or community.
- **Reconciliation and Healing:** During events commemorating historical injustices, days of mourning, reconciliation efforts, or moments of reflection on the impact of colonisation and its legacies.

Half-Mast Display Period

- **National Tragedies:** Flag lowered for period of mourning appropriate to the scale and impact of the tragedy, as determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, government authorities, or relevant organisations.
- **Passing of Distinguished Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders or Individuals:** Flag lowered for period of mourning commensurate with the significance of the individual's contributions and stature within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and broader society, and, where practicable, in consultation with the family of the Elder or individual.
- **Reconciliation and Healing:** Flag lowered for the duration of events, ceremonies, or commemorations dedicated to reconciliation and healing, as determined by organisers or community Elders or leaders.

Community Notification and Compliance

- **Community Notification:** Notify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, relevant government bodies, organisations, and CIT staff of the decision to lower the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Flags to half-mast, along with the reasons for the gesture and the expected duration.
- **Compliance:** Ensure that all entities responsible for flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags adhere to this protocol and lower the flag appropriately during designated periods of mourning or commemoration at CIT.

Further Information on Flag Protocols

For further guidance on Whole of Government (ACT Public Service) Protocols for Flag Lowering and Raising, please see: [The Australian Flags Book](#)



CHAPTER 7: PROTOCOLS FOR RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT, COMMUNICATION, AND CONSULTATION WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAFF, STUDENTS, COMMUNITIES, ORGANISATIONS, AND BUSINESSES

Context

Cultural respect and cultural safety are the principles on which successful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is built through meaningful consultation and engagement, and open, respectful communication.

Culturally Safe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identification at CIT

Self-identification by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students is key to promoting cultural safety and monitoring educational outcomes, in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. By self-identifying, individuals can access networks, opportunities, and resources within CIT and ACTPS, designed to enhance cultural safety and educational and career opportunities. CIT is committed to fostering a culturally safe environment that supports staff and students to self-identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, while respecting the decision of those who choose not to identify.

At CIT, improving educational access and success for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is a priority, and we regularly track and report progress in alignment our obligations under the National to improve education, employment, cultural safety, and well-being outcomes. CIT is committed to fostering a culturally safe environment that supports self-identification while respecting the decision of those who choose not to identify.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identified Positions at CIT

The ACT Government recognises the value of individual differences and encourages diversity in ACTPS workplaces to improve the way we deliver services to the diverse ACT community. To support the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Head of Service (delegate) has the power to declare any vacant position as an identified position (section 13, page 7 of the Public Sector Management Standards 2016).²⁴ An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified position may only be filled by an individual from one or both groups.

Confirmation of Aboriginality for Students and Staff at CIT

There are some instances where students or staff may need to provide Confirmation of Aboriginality to access a scholarship, specific study program, or an identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander position. This document confirms a person's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage. For an individual to be issued a Confirmation of Aboriginality, they must provide evidence such as ancestry, community acceptance, and/or cultural connection. This document helps individuals access certain programs and services aimed at supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People and communities. A Confirmation of Aboriginality cannot be signed by a member of an incorporated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation who is an immediate family member of the applicant.

It is important to note that:

- Australian government bodies cannot issue a document that confirms an individual's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status and that these certificates can be only issued by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander incorporated organisations.
- There is currently no sequenced DNA specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This is due to a range of factors, including the complex and diverse nature of these populations' genetic backgrounds, the relatively small

²⁴ ACT Government. (2016). [Public Sector Management Standards 2016](#).



size of each unique group, and community distrust in medical, research, and data collection due to unethical practices historically²⁵.

Guidance for CIT Staff Handling Confirmation of Aboriginality Documentation

There are instances where current or prospective students or staff members may be required to submit a Confirmation of Aboriginality document to document eligibility for an identified position, qualification, or scholarship, or for instance where a professional development or program participation requires this. In all instances, CIT staff must accept this document and not request further supporting documentation or evidence. Requesting further evidence of an individual's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background, including genetic tests, is not only inappropriate and deeply offensive, but also illegal under Australian law.

Relevant Legislation

- [Race Discrimination Act 1975 \(Cwlth\)](#)
- [Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 \(Cwlth\)](#)

Further Information for Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

- [CIT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Policy](#)
- Students can reach out to CIT Yurauna staff for support with obtaining a Confirmation of Aboriginality: CIT.YuraunaCentre@cit.edu.au

Respecting Gender Roles and Intersectionality

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have multiple ways of defining gender roles and behaviours and there are wide variations across groups and communities influenced by both traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural norms and Western gender norms.

Be mindful that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures can have strong gender roles expressed through 'Men's Business' and 'Women's Business'. It is also important to remember that some people may be comfortable with Western ways of relating to men and women.

It is also important to be aware of gender diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Sistergirls and Brotherboys are terms used to describe trans and gender diverse people in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and that in some groups, there is less acceptance of these individuals. It is also important to note that not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trans and gender diverse people identify with these terms, and they should not be used without checking with the individual first.

Respecting Familial and Kinship Hierarchies

It is important to note that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship systems are complex and can vary significantly across groups. CIT staff should be respectful of these hierarchies when interacting with members of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or family group.

Self-determination and Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)

The right to self-determination has application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in data collection, analysis, and usage. Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) is paramount for ensuring that data practices are respectful and equitable. FPIC means engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities in a way that is free from coercion, provides ample opportunity for informed decision-making, and occurs well before any data gathering begins.

²⁵ Rees, S. (2000). The Ethics of Medical Research: The Case of Aboriginal Australians. *The Medical Journal of Australia*, 172(11), pp. 540-542, and Gilbert, K. 2005. Research and Aboriginal Australians: An Unethical Legacy. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 29(1), pp. 57-61.



Using a Video or Image of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Person, Group

Whenever requesting permission to use a video or image:

- State why you want to use the video or image and how it will be used. If the purpose or context changes, the permission needs to be re-obtained.
- Request permission to do so, either in writing or verbally or both.
- If permission is not obtained, respect that response and do not use it.
- If permission is obtained, record how the process of obtaining permission occurred.
- Ensure you have obtained the correct name and spelling of the person's or peoples name/s.
- Include a warning in your communications e.g. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this (video/website) may contain images and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away."
- Send the person(s) a copy of the communications.
- CIT Marketing and CIT Strategic Communications maintain record keeping of media consent forms.

Respectfully Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Businesses

CIT supports and implements [the ACTPS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy \(ATSIPP\)](#) to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurship, business, and economic development, as well as provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with increased opportunities to participate in the economy. This policy supports current and future agreements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

In addition to the ACTPS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy, CIT staff are encouraged to reach out to the [CIT Procurements and Contracts team](#) for support with engaging a Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses is another way staff across CIT can contribute to reconciliation.

How to Find Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Businesses

- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprise Search - Procurement ACT](#)
- [Supply Nation | Australia's largest national directory of Indigenous businesses](#)
- [Office of Registrar of Indigenous Corporations | Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations \(oric.gov.au\)](#)

Procuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artworks

When procuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks for CIT, preference will be given to artists who can demonstrate a connection to the ACT and surrounding region.

As with all procurement of artworks (physical or digital), before commencing the procurement process, CIT staff must always seek advice on copyright, licensing terms, and insurance requirements from the [CIT Audit, Risk, and Corporate Governance team](#) and the following ACT Government areas:

- [ACT Insurance Authority](#)
- [Procurement ACT](#)
- [ACT General Solicitor](#)