



Department of
Education

Public education
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WELCOME TO COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY PROTOCOLS

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal custodianship of country needs to be recognised at public events conducted by the Department through a formal process of Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country.

This recognition assists in developing strong partnerships with Aboriginal communities throughout Western Australia.

It also demonstrates the commitment of the Department to support culturally responsive practices and behaviours by providing opportunities for all staff and students to develop understanding and respect for Aboriginal histories, peoples, cultures and languages.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY

Welcome to Country is a ceremony performed by Aboriginal people in Western Australia to welcome visitors to their traditional land or sea.

Welcome to Country has been part of Aboriginal culture in Western Australia for thousands of years.

Aboriginal people have clearly defined territories and boundaries that are still observed by Aboriginal groups today. When entering another group's country, traditional protocols required visitors to seek permission to enter. When permission was provided, visitors were granted safe passage through another's country and were held responsible for maintaining the cultural protocols of that land.

Traditionally, Welcome to Country may take several hours or days and involve a range of ceremonies. Today, while these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances, the traditional practice of welcoming visitors to country and offering safe passage remains in place.

A Welcome to Country must be performed by a traditional custodian of the land or waters where the event is being held. If endorsed by Elders, students can perform, or be involved in, a Welcome to Country in schools.

Notes:

- The term 'event' includes, but is not limited to, a ceremony, meeting, function or conference.
- The term 'Aboriginal' respectfully refers to Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.
- This document may contain images of people who are deceased.

March 2016



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

An Acknowledgement of Country is a way for all people to show awareness of and respect for Aboriginal cultures and heritage, and the ongoing relationship the traditional custodians have with their land or waters.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be undertaken by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In schools, students are encouraged to undertake an Acknowledgement of Country.

WELCOME TO COUNTRY OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

As a general rule, if people are travelling from areas outside the location of the event, it is appropriate to have a Welcome to Country.

This is particularly important if Aboriginal people are in attendance as the tradition for a welcome is to provide safety while on someone else's country.

The Department supports the acknowledgement of the traditional custodians through an Acknowledgement of Country at school assemblies, staff meetings and other internal events as this demonstrates respect for Aboriginal cultures and heritage.

OTHER CEREMONIES AND PROTOCOLS

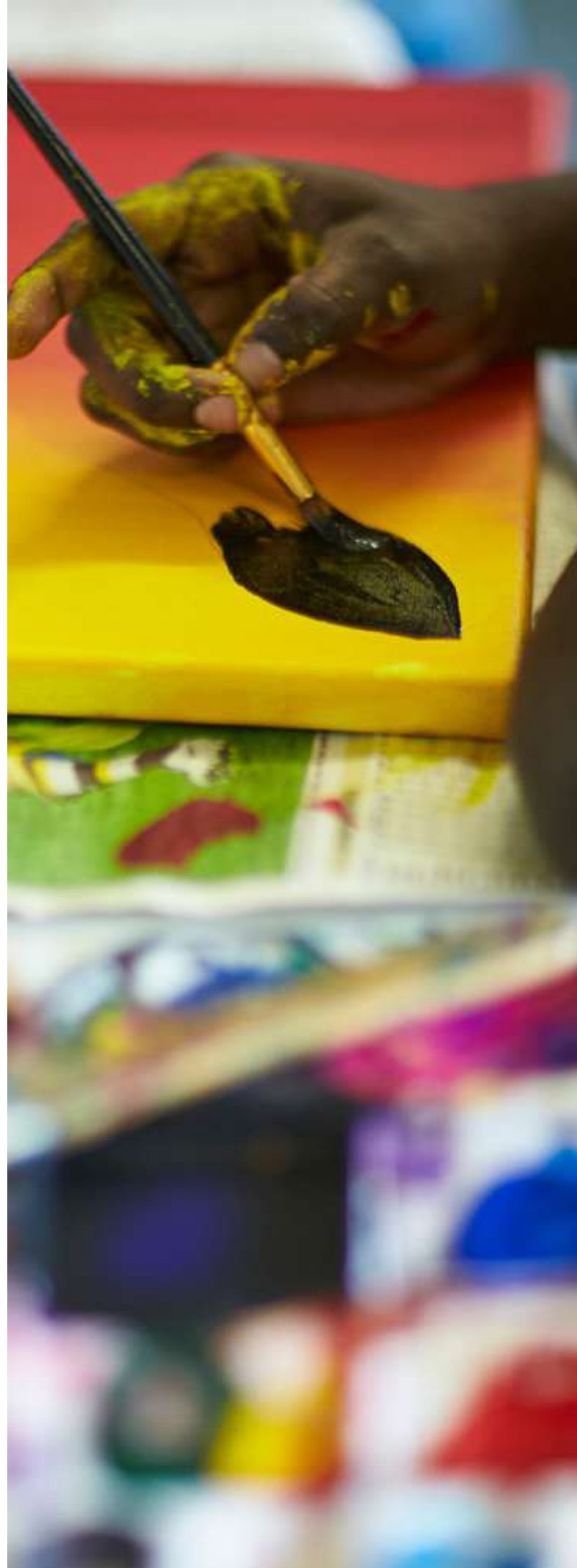
The Department recognises and acknowledges that there are a significant number of Aboriginal ceremonies and protocols to be respected.

Some ceremonies and protocols are sensitive and not discussed or shared with the broader community. Some may not apply in all parts of Western Australia.

Staff should check with their regional Aboriginal education team if they are unsure whether a group or individual may be sensitive about ceremonies and protocols.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PLANNING AN EVENT

1. Decide whether a Welcome to Country or an Acknowledgement of Country is most appropriate. Seek advice from Aboriginal staff or local Aboriginal networks if required.
2. The time allocated to a Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country should be reasonable in the context of the overall event proceedings and timeframe. For example, for an event of about one hour such as a school opening, the Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country should be no more than five minutes. Discuss with the person performing the ceremony and the Master of Ceremonies to ensure the event is completed in the allocated time.
3. For local events (for example, at a school or office), a local Aboriginal staff member or community member in attendance may like to be part of the Acknowledgement of Country. They may also indicate if a Welcome to Country should be considered.
4. Be conscious of language barriers and cultural differences when liaising directly with Elders.
5. As a Welcome to Country is a cultural protocol based on the provision of intellectual property, a fee for service normally applies. The fee may vary depending on whether a cultural performance (for example, a song, story or dance) is included as part of the Welcome to Country.
6. If appropriate, invite the Elder or representative to take part in the rest of the event and assign a suitable staff member to ensure they are looked after and feel comfortable during the event.
7. A written thank you is appropriate and good practice after engaging someone to perform a Welcome to Country.
8. In some parts of the State, there may be overlapping Native Title land claims which remain unresolved. The local Aboriginal Land Council or Native Title representative body is able to assist if this occurs, and may be aware of arrangements in the community for providing a Welcome to Country.



WELCOME TO COUNTRY

ACTIVITY/PROTOCOL

DESCRIPTION

ROLE OF EVENT ORGANISER

Welcome to Country

Incorporated into the opening of major internal and public events.

Conducted by an appropriate person such as a recognised Elder or traditional custodian in the local community (and who belongs to the relevant language group).

In schools, can be performed by students, or involve students, if endorsed by Elders.

Is usually the first item on the program for an event.

Is specific to the traditional custodians.

May include stories, dances, songs, smoking ceremonies or combination of these.

May include an Elder using symbols and explaining the significance of the symbols.

May be conducted in English or the group's traditional language.

Requires a response by the next speaker.

Seek advice from more than one source when identifying the local traditional custodians, including:

- regional Aboriginal education teams
- local Aboriginal community representatives
- Native Title representative bodies
- local Aboriginal organisations.

Invite local Aboriginal representatives to be part of the planning and to decide the format of the ceremony, who should be invited, who should perform the Welcome to Country, and how that person is recognised for their time and commitment.

Provide the traditional custodians with the background about the school/office, explain the purpose of the event and give information about any theme as an Elder, or Elders, may include a traditional focus to the theme or purpose of the event.

Allow sufficient time for traditional decision making and discussion among traditional custodians.

Request the Welcome to Country in language is translated into English so the audience understands the welcome message.

The speaker following the Welcome to Country acknowledges the traditional custodians, including the person who delivered the Welcome to Country.

The following can be used to respond:

“Thank you <name of representative> for welcoming us today. I respectfully acknowledge Traditional Custodians of this land on which we are meeting, the <traditional name/s> people and pay my respects to Elders past and present.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PARTICIPATION

ACTIVITY/PROTOCOL	DESCRIPTION	ROLE OF EVENT ORGANISER
<p>Acknowledgement of Country</p> <p>Suitable at smaller and less formal events.</p>	<p>Can be performed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.</p> <p>In schools, is encouraged to be undertaken by students.</p> <p>Is usually the first item on the program for an event.</p>	<p>Acknowledgement where traditional custodians are not known (or are in dispute):</p> <p>“I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, of Elders past and present, on which this event takes place.”</p> <p>Acknowledgement where traditional custodians are determined/known:</p> <p>“I respectfully acknowledge the past and present traditional custodians of this land on which we are meeting, the <traditional name(s)> people. It is a privilege to be standing on <traditional name> country. I also acknowledge the contributions of Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal Australians to the education of all children and people in this country we all live in and share together – Australia.”</p> <p>[Note: May acknowledge multiple groups if advised this is appropriate.]</p>

ACTIVITY/PROTOCOL	DESCRIPTION	ROLE OF EVENT ORGANISER
<p>Acknowledgement of the participation and involvement of Elders or the community</p> <p>Undertaken when Elders or the local Aboriginal community are invited to a culturally significant event or have significantly contributed to the event.</p>	<p>Is a sign of respect to those involved when an event is organised with the help of, and delivered in collaboration with, the local Aboriginal community.</p> <p>In schools, is encouraged to be undertaken by students.</p>	<p>Acknowledge any Elders present where the identity of all participants is unclear.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>“I would like to show my respect and acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, and the Elders past and present, on which this event takes place.”</p> <p>Younger generations may also be acknowledged.</p>