

Building an Advisory Committee

Bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input to your reconciliation journey

For organisations with a **Reconciliation Action Plan**, some of the most important feedback you will receive from Reconciliation Australia is the **need to include input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** to progress reconciliation in the workplace. This is important for all businesses, with or without a RAP.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3.8% of the population, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are often called upon to do this **additional work** on top of their jobs. This is called **cultural load**, and there is more information about this in our [cultural load factsheet](#) as part of your membership toolkit.



Building an Advisory Committee

The input of an external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee can:

- 1)** Mitigate cultural load and identity strain on First Nations employees from additional work.
- 2)** Act as a vital link between your organisation and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders your organisation is seeking input from.
- 3)** Offer a collaborative method to facilitate meaningful participation with local stakeholders in developing and implementing a RAP.

All members of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory committee require financial remuneration for their time and expertise.

Building an Advisory Committee

How to create an Expression of Interest for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee

If your organisation would like to establish an Advisory Committee, Reconciliation NSW has created a guideline EOI for your organisation to personalise.

[Insert company name] acknowledges the [Traditional Custodians] of the lands on which our offices stand.

[Insert company name] recognises the importance of self-determination and the vital role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in leading direction for race relations and improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander socioeconomic outcomes.



Building an Advisory Committee

Who are you seeking?

We are seeking the voices of:

- [Aboriginal land of which you are located on] community members, Custodians, Elders and young people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in the area
- Staff of local Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations
- Individuals who have worked in the sector for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators
- First Nations peoples that work within the [same sector as your organisation]



Building an Advisory Committee

Role of the Advisory Committee

What role do you want the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee to have in your organisation's reconciliation journey?

The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee will be to [select/expand on roles most important to you and come up with your own]:

- Guide RAP objectives.
- Provide advice on strategic direction.
- Help ensure that cultural knowledge and lived experience is considered in [organisation's] work.
- Help improve and develop initiatives that relate to [our organisation's] RAP.
- Provide advice and feedback on the development and implementation of [our organisation's] RAP.
- Improve RAP Working Group understanding and direction.
- Offer knowledge of local community needs.
- Contribute to [our organisation's] relationship building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and leaders.





Building an Advisory Committee

Responsibilities

Participate in quarterly meetings [insert frequency of meetings here]

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board meet at least [4] times a year. Meeting attendance fees will be paid as follows:

- For meetings of less than four hours duration - \$x
- For meetings of more than four hours duration - \$x

As part of your membership benefits, Reconciliation NSW will share your EOI for paid Advisory Committee positions with its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members.

Suggested practices and protocols for your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee:

For productive and positive engagement between your organisation and its Advisory Committee, it is good to establish shared objectives and mutual understanding of the intentions of your collaboration together.



Building an Advisory Committee

Establishing key principles, a statement of objectives, or a terms of reference can be a useful starting point for the Advisory Committee.

To operate successfully, the establishment of an Advisory Committee and its work should be grounded in **respect**.

It is critical to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are treated with dignity and **respect**.

This means:

- Tangible recognition of Aboriginal history, heritage, cultures, and protocols.
- An understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, racism, intergenerational trauma, child removal, and mass incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- An understanding of the local communities your organisation operates within, to meet the needs of local communities through meaningful engagement and RAP actions.



Building an Advisory Committee

Terms of Reference

An Indigenous Advisory Committee should:

- include a clear terms of reference.
- have a statement of the objectives of the committee.
- link to the goals of the RAP.
- align with your decision-making practices.
- basic governance and accounting standards should be in place, and activities subject to critical oversight.

Leadership

Wherever possible, it is recommended that the Advisory Panel be chaired by an organisation representative, who is acknowledged and respected by Aboriginal communities and perceived as a person with strong ability to influence organisation policy.

Membership

Membership of the Advisory Panel should include your RAP Champion and key senior managers who are committed to participating in the process of enhancing RAP goals and outcomes for First Nations peoples.



Building an Advisory Committee

Community

Community membership needs to include key Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders who have an interest in and commitment to Aboriginal matters. Membership should also encompass the diversity of opinions and issues within Aboriginal communities. So consult with a variety of community members, including all claimants to the Country if there is more than one group with a claim to the land .

There should be sufficient flexibility to allow different First Nations peoples to attend meetings, depending on which issues are on the agenda.

Meeting times

Meeting frequency and times should be fixed and regular. However, it is important to take into account Sorry Business, cultural responsibilities and customs. Read our factsheet on [Connecting with Community](#) for more information.

Building an Advisory Committee

Meeting venues

Venues for meetings will need to be negotiated with community representatives. In many areas, your office may be entirely appropriate - and may well be expected by community members. However, in some areas there may be strong cultural and historical reasons why this is not the case; it is always important to ascertain member preferences for meeting venues.

There is also the potential to meet within Aboriginal communities, allowing your Advisory Panel members to connect at a local level. Such opportunities are opened through community invitation.

Resourcing & Emoluments

- **Always financially remunerate** members of your Aboriginal Advisory Panel **for time and knowledge shared**. A fee structure should be created.
- In addition to any payments made for their involvement, **assistance with transport or childcare may be required** to enable the participation of members.
- Resourcing can come in non-monetary forms, **ask 'how else can your organisation support leaders and community for co-designing local and strategic action?'** (examples: Aboriginal Community Controlled program support, provision of org spaces for meetings, providing volunteers for local work etc.)

Building an Advisory Committee

Agendas

- Agendas should be distributed well in advance of scheduled meetings to allow sufficient time for Aboriginal representatives to consult with their communities.
- A prepared agenda helps to ensure the smooth operation of Advisory Panel meetings and their productivity.

Meeting procedures

- Negotiate a Meeting Code of Practice with Aboriginal representatives to ensure that Aboriginal Advisory members input will be given weight.

Decision-making

- Decision-making must be shared and collaborative.
- Transparency is key and will set expectations for how decisions and strategic directions will be reached.
- Undermining true collaboration will damage future community relations.